# A COMPARISON OF THE "INNER PERSON" IN CHRISTIANITY WITH THE "TATHĀGATAGARBHA" IN EAST ASIAN BUDDHISM: AN EXPLORATION OF THE MEANINGS, FUNCTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN "INNER PERSON" IN LIGHT OF BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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by

Jim Chulung Chen

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This Dissertation, written by

**Jim Chulung Chen**

under the direction of his Faculty Committee and approved by its members,

has been presented to and accepted by

the Faculty of Claremont School of Theology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty Committee**

Philip Clayton, Chairperson

Andrew Dreitcer

John Becker

**Dean of the Faculty**

Andrew Dreitcer

May 2023

# ABSTRACT

## A Comparison of the "Inner Person" in Christianity with the "Tathāgatagarbha" in East Asian Buddhism: An Exploration of the Meanings, Functions, and Implications of the Christian "Inner Person" in Light of Buddhist Teachings

Jim Chulung Chen

This dissertation examines the Buddhist conception of *Tathāgatagarbha* (womb/embryo of the Thus-Come One) or Buddha Nature of East Asia Buddhism to aid in the understanding and development of the Inner Person in the Christian New Testament, as viewed from my Evangelical Protestant perspective. A comparative approach will be employed by attempting to find analogies and similarities between the two traditions. No claim is made that the parallels found are equivalent, due to the tremendous conceptual, cultural, historical and religious chasm separating the two widely diverse traditions.

**Theological Stance on the Bible.** As a Christian Evangelical, three Christian presuppositions are particularly relevant: (1) Biblical inerrancy, (2) Perspicuity of the Bible, and (3) the existence of mysteries in the Bible. Note that the last two points do not contradict each other, as specified in the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, which not only declares the Bible as infallible and clear in its salvific messages, but also allows for mysteries contained therein that are beyond human comprehension. Allowing for the existence of mystical passages does not indicate an esoteric or Gnostic posture, both of which are not intended in this dissertation.

**Rationale.** The initial motivation for this comparative project is that the phrase, *inner person* (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος), in the Christian New Testament appears quite important to the

spirituality of the Christian, and yet occurs only four times, without much elaboration by the authors. Thus, strictly and literally taken from Christianity alone, the phrase is shrouded in a cloak of mystery and seemingly impracticable, even incomprehensible. In contrast, the notion of Buddha nature or *Tathāgatagarbha*, which in certain respects parallels the Christian idea of the Inner Person, is very well discoursed, especially in East Asia Buddhism. It is, therefore, through the rich, complex, and diverse Buddhist literature on the *Tathāgatagarbha* that this dissertation will attempt to shed some light on the mysterious Inner Person of the Christian New Testament.

**Methodology.** The approach to the *Tathāgatagarbha* discourse of Buddhism is carried out through studying one of the most significant *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras*, viz. the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (MMPNS). This study will utilize mostly the *sūtra*'s Chinese rendering, constantly referencing its English translations and commentaries. Existing English translations of this *sūtra* primarily consist of two works: Mark Laurence Blum's partial translation and Kosho Yamamoto's full translation, both of which have been translated from Dharmakshema's Chinese version.

Two major tasks serve as the overarching guiding principle of this project: (1) defining the Christian concept of the Inner Person as exclusively applicable to this study – researching exegeses, Christian contemplatives, and theological anthropology; and (2) building a model of illumination for this comparative work – analyzing Buddhist *sūtras* which have similar or parallel concepts in *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine.

From the 3 areas of Christian studies on the Inner Person and the Buddhist research on the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, I then summarize several apparent similarities for comparison. And I conclude that the Buddha Nature theory has a great potential to increase and improve the Christian awareness and understanding of the concept of Inner Person.

## Acknowledgments

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# PREFACE

Writing on the topic about the Christian concept of the Inner Person, in all seriousness, is a potentially paradoxical undertaking, because it necessitates the recognition of attempting to discover and disclose a Biblical μυστήριον (*mustérion*, mystery), which, by definition, is out of the reach of natural human cognitive capacity – divine mystery can only be revealed by God through the Holy Spirit, at the foreordained time and to the spiritually enlightened persons.[1] Certain Biblical mysteries, like the trinity, have been more clearly revealed in the course of the history of the Church, but many remain sealed hermetically within God's bosom. In between these two opposites, there is another class of mystery that God chooses to reveal slightly, but not fully. The concept of the Inner Person, which only occurs in the Christian Bible four times, should qualify as this latter class of mystery because only the apostles Paul (3 times) and Peter (1 time) mentioned it, and they did not elaborate much on it. The question, then, is: why does God reveal so little about it, and if God does not fully reveal it, who are we to attempt to talk about it? But divine revelations do not preclude rational reasoning. In fact, it was through the intelligence of past theologians that many of God's mystical truths became noted, debated, and finally established. Accordingly, this dissertation does not claim to be able to unlock the mystery of the Inner Person in the Scripture. Its purpose is only to raise the awareness of the potentially important Christian concept and stimulate further scholarly conversations and dialogues, even inter-religiously.

[1] "In the N.T. [the word mustérion] denotes, not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit." W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), s.v. "MYSTERY."

Given the nature of such a divine mystery, with few clues to rely on in the Bible itself, this topic of the Christian Inner Person must be approached very humbly and reverentially by constantly depending on the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The author does not, in any audacious or even sacrilegious manner, claim to have special, superior knowledge in the Bible, or to be able to unequivocally demonstrate the concept of the Inner Person to the readers, because that task belongs to the divine territory. It was only because of the author's personal aspiration for the knowledge of the vast human interior world that he became intensely fascinated by the topic. When the concept of the *Tathāgatagarbha* of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which appears to have an uncanny resemblance to the Christian Inner Person, came into purview, thoughts began to occur on the possibility of a comparative study between the two traditions, in the hope of better understanding the mystical but potentially rewarding concept of the Inner Person. Broadly speaking from a Christian viewpoint, this task is essentially that of enriching and deepening our understanding of God's so-called *special revelations* in the Scripture through His *general revelations* in the Buddhist *sūtras*.

Therefore, this dissertation is not an authoritative corroboration about the Christian Inner Person. Rather, this is a scholarly journey to see what light can be cast upon this weighty mystery, when we hold it up to the ray of wisdom from the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And the readers are invited to participate in this intellectual adventure, as the author prayerfully undertakes the quest for enlightenment.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## *Thesis Statement*

This dissertation proposes to examine the Buddhist conception of *Tathāgatagarbha* (lit. womb or embryo of the Thus-Come One) or *fuó-xìng* (lit. Buddha Nature), especially coming from the Chán (Jpn. Zen) sect, to aid in the understanding and development of the Inner Person in the Christian New Testament, as viewed from an Evangelical Protestant perspective, by attempting to find analogies and similarities between the two traditions. However, no claim is made that the parallels found are equivalent, due to the tremendous conceptual, cultural, historical and religious chasms separating the two widely diverse traditions.

The concept of "inner or inward person" should not be unfamiliar to most religions, because, whether theistic or atheistic, they seek to go beyond the visible, tangible, and physical realm to find and develop the "spiritual" aspect of our being, which implies the necessity to look inwardly. Christianity certainly has her own version of the inner facet in spirituality. However, this aspect in Christianity is in danger of becoming obscure, at best, and even obsolete, at worst, due to the tendency of many modern churches' emphasis on either reaching outwardly observable goals – increases in membership, donation, participation, etc, or excessively embracing Pentecostalism – glossolalia, healing, prophecy, and exorcism. The obvious and likely result for this trend has been an inclination toward secularism, pragmatism, or fanaticism, and a concomitant neglect of the Inner Person, which, nevertheless, might hold the key to authentic Christian spirituality.

Closely related to the Inner Person is the question of the composition of the human being, whether it is dichotomic (body and soul) or trichotomic (body, soul, and spirit). While this

theological-anthropological issue remains unsettled, the stance taken here leans towards the latter, for the purpose of differentiating humans from all other animals. As such, this dissertation hypothesizes that the spirit would be the seat, or the equivalent, of the Inner Person as found in the Christian New Testament. It is not to say that the Inner Person is a part of the spirit (πνεῦμα *pneuma*), making the human essentially a being of "tetra-chotomy," but that the two anthropological terms are interchangeable and synonymous. The reason for this special and relatively rare term *inner person* would then be to highlight and call to attention certain dimensions of the human spirit. The main thesis here is that these special spiritual facets related to the Inner Person, though not clearly elucidated in the Scripture, can be greatly illuminated by the study of Buddhist texts, especially the doctrine of *Tathāgatagarbha* of East Asian Buddhism.

## ***Rationale***

The initial motivation for this comparative project is that the phrase *inner person* (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος) in the Christian New Testament appears quite important to the spirituality of the Christian, and yet occurs only four times (Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:4, the last being a more indirect reference). Each occurrence abruptly ends without much elaboration, as if this topic is intentionally left in suspension by the authors. Thus, strictly and literally taken from Christianity alone, the phrase is shrouded in a cloak of mystery and seemingly impracticable, even incomprehensible. Adding to this scarcity of occurrence, the fact that Christianity is a heterosoteric religion does not help this term garner much attention or recognition, since salvation comes from without, and does not seem to require one's turning inward.[1] The few who

[1] *Heterosoteric*: *Hetereo* means "different" or "other"; σωτήρ or *soter* means "savior"; thus, *heterosoteric* means "of salvation from other(s)" and is the opposite of *autosoteric*, "of salvation by self-effort."

venture into the realm of the inner dimensions are usually labeled "mystics" and casually dismissed by mainstream "orthodox" Christians. This situation could be a serious loss or hindrance to Christians seeking to walk the inward path of God.

In contrast, the notion of Buddha nature or *Tathāgatagarbha*, which in certain respects parallels the Christian idea of the Inner Person, is very well discoursed, especially in the Chán sect of East Asian Buddhism. This phenomenon presents quite an unusual reversal of the largely cataphatic attitude of Western philosophy and religion, as opposed to the more apophatic inclination of the East. It is, therefore, through the rich and complex (though not uniform) Buddhist literature on the *Tathāgatagarbha* that this dissertation will, with the help of the Holy Spirit, attempt to shine some light on the mysterious Inner Person of the Christian New Testament.

## *The Obscurity of the Inner Person*

If the Inner Person is important in any spiritual sense, why is the Christian New Testament so reluctant to mention it? Why did Paul, Peter and other apostles not promulgate the truth of it so as to help fellow Christians? Did they intentionally tried to hide it from us by making seemingly incidental, casual remarks on it, by withholding the essential clarification?

From the Christian Reformed School's doctrine of the Scripture, which encompasses four major categories of divine authority, necessity, perspicuity, and sufficiency, since the Bible is inerrant, and the result of infallible inspiration of God through the Holy Spirit, if the human authors either purposefully or unintentionally created mysteries out of any concepts (which, incidentally, do not violate the perspicuity aspect, as will be explained in a later section of this chapter), these mysteries should not be deemed solely the writers' own doing, but the cooperation

between them and the Holy Spirit.[2] If one subscribes to this line of reasoning, all mysteries in the Scripture, including the Inner Person, are of God's own design in His infinite wisdom.

This prompts the question: why would God include mysteries in the Book of His Word? Is it not His intention to make all truths lucid for people to read? From the human perspective, it may appear that God is hiding something from us by those mystical passages in the Bible. However, the great transcendence of God entails that He Himself is the greatest Mystery of the universe. The apostle Paul told us, through a paraphrase of Isaiah 40:13, "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?" (Romans 11:34).[3] Furthermore, YHWH also spoke through the prophet, Isaiah, saying, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). These and other similar sayings in the Bible indicate that it is impossible to know God and His things, unless He graciously bestows a special understanding to a person, as in the case of the prophets and the apostles. Since such gifts of comprehension are not communicable, these messengers of God cannot just plainly reveal the divine messages that they received to the reader. They wrote the Word of God down, which then became Scriptures for later generations, because the Holy Spirit can subsequently work in the human spirits to effect true, subjective understanding.[4]

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[2] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 163–67. Berkhof (1873–1957) was a Reformed theologian and President and Professor at Calvin Theological Seminary in Michigan, teaching Biblical studies and then systematic theology.

[3] Unless indicated otherwise, all English Bible verses are quoted from *The King James Version of 1611/1769*. Greek Bible verses are quoted from Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The Greek New Testament in the Original Greek*, American ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881); and Hebrew verses from Kirk Lowery and Steve Salisbury, eds., *Westminster Hebrew Morphology*, release 4.12 (J. Alan Groves Center, September 30, 2009), in Costas Stergiou, theWord Bible Software, v. 4.0.0.1342 (2003–2012).

[4] Henceforth, by "subjective," I am adopting the following definition from the *Collins English Dictionary* online: "1. existing in the mind; belonging to the thinking subject rather than to the object of thought (opposed to objective); 2. pertaining to or characteristic of an individual; personal; individual." It should never be understood as "placing excessive emphasis on one's own moods, attitudes, opinions, etc.; unduly egocentric." *Collins English*

In the case of the Inner Person, it was not that Paul and Peter wanted to hide it and make it mysterious. On the contrary, they were trying to reveal it as best they could. Conceivably, if one is open to the concept of the Inner Person, one could find hints of it pervading everywhere in the Bible, even though the particular phrase *Inner Person* is seldom even mentioned. Following are a few examples that may show its prevalence in both Testaments:[5]

- Psalms 103:1 – The psalmist, David, blessed the LORD, saying: "O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name." What exactly did David discover within himself, other than the soul, that is capable of praising God's name? Could this possibly be a reference to the Inner Person?
- Ezekiel 36:26-27 – YHWH's words through the prophet: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you … And I will put My spirit within you …." This was a prophecy of the old era, finding its fulfillment in the present New Covenant era, in which the new heart or new spirit given by God should come to replace the old. What is given to the regenerate Christian is not another spirit created by God, but the Holy Spirit of God that makes His abode deeply within. In the next chapter, we shall see that many Bible commentators equate the Inner Person with either "heart" or "spirit." If so, then this Biblical passage would take on the meaning that YHWH desires to regenerate the Inner Person to function anew in His elect.
- Luke 5:4-8 – Seeing Jesus' miracle of a big catch of fish, Peter suddenly confessed that he was a sinner not worthy of the Lord's company. What invoked such response from something seeming unrelated? A reasonable surmise would be that his Inner Person must have received

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*Dictionary*, s.v. "subjective," accessed October 22, 2022, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/subjective.

[5] These passages themselves do not definitively prove the existence of the Inner Person, since it is a divine mystery, as already mentioned in the Preface. Nevertheless, one could potentially see some shadows of it in these Scriptures.

a great enlightening from Jesus' miracle. His display of faith and confession was much deeper than many Christians' experience of salvation, because his response was not beseeching for redemption from his sin, as common sense would dictate, but a feeling of unworthiness toward the divine Savior, so profound that he asked Jesus to depart from him. Such reaction likely points to a sudden awakening of the Inner Person.

- Matthew 13:10-13 – Jesus told the disciples that "it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Outsiders were not able to understand Jesus' parables, "because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." How is it that the same parables heard and the same miracles seen by the two groups of people had such dramatically different outcomes in them? Was it possible that the Inner Person of the disciples was enlightened, but not that of the outsiders? Also, what did Jesus mean that the outsiders "see not and … hear not"? Could He be implying that there is another entity within – the Inner Person – that sees and hears in different ways than the physical eyes and ear?
- Psalms 1:2 – The psalmist described the blessed as one who "in His law doth … meditate day and night." It is similar to the apostle Paul's injunction: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). If we take the literal meanings of these two passages, who is capable of such ceaseless meditation and prayer? If none of our outward person can, then it is onlypossible within the Inner Person that is fully redeemed by God.
- Galatians 2:20 – What did Paul mean when he declared that he had been "crucified with (συνεσταύρωμαι, perfect tense, passive voice, indicative mood) Christ"? And how was he able to say: "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"? Paul saw the crucifixion of the "old man" on the cross with Christ (Romans 6:6), so he proclaimed that from then on,

it was not the unregenerate old self living inside him, but the new life of Christ had come in to substitute for that old life. It does not mean that Paul IS Christ, but that Christ had come into him to live for him fully – an undeniable substitution of the old life with the new. One could conceivably say that all the dying, substitution, and transformation had transpired in the Inner Person of the apostle, because outwardly, Paul was still Paul.

- Romans 14:4 – We are admonished not to judge others, because each person has an internal master, and "to his own master he standeth or falleth." This master should not be taken as Jesus reigning inside through the Holy Spirit, because it would not make sense that He is the person's "own master," (c.f. 1 Corinthians 1:2) and that He would cause a person to "fall." If Paul was not excluding non-Christians here, then who is this sovereign entity called *master* inside each person? Most likely it should be the Inner Person taking charge, causing the person to "stand" or "fall" depending on its redemptive status.
- John 14:19-20 – Before departing from the earth, Jesus told the disciples that they would still see Him; but even more importantly, they would truly live, because Jesus is in the Father, and the disciples are in Him, and He in them. How does Jesus live in the believers? Could His being in them be a testimony of the renewed Inner Person? Similarly, Jesus had this to say: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me" (John 15:4). Is this not about the relationship He would have with the believer's Inner Person?
- 2 Corinthians 12:1-3 – Paul recalled his experience of being taken up to the third heaven fourteen years ago; twice he said that he did not know whether he had been in the body or out of the body in that vision. If it were his "outward person" that was transported, why would he be so uncertain about it? Most likely it indicates that it was his Inner Person that was raptured

to paradise to hear "unspeakable words," rendering the distinction "in the body" and "out of the body" unintelligible.

- Colossians 3:15 – "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts …" The Inner Person is also identified with the heart (see next chapter), where God's peace desires to reign.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." This is a seemingly quite innocent admonition of Paul – not so difficult to understand; but quite nigh impossible to implement. Few Christians ever thought about the impracticability of this counsel, until they really take it seriously to live it out. In this life that is replete with sufferings, is it feasible to "rejoice evermore"? In our busy everyday life, is it possible to "pray without ceasing"? With so many unpleasant, unpredictable, and sometimes even catastrophic incidents constantly bombarding our everyday lives, how do we remain thankful in everything? On the other hand, if the apostle Paul had not attained such amazing posture, how could he ask us to follow? How could he demand that it is the "will of God" for us? If these mandates reflect his actual attainment, then we may deduce that it most likely happened inside him, in the Inner Person, and that only it is capable of such impressive feat. This goes hand in hand with his declaration: "to me, to live is Christ," since it is nothing short of the complete union with the Savior.

These Biblical passages suggest that the Bible could be viewed as teeming with the concept of the Inner Person without explicit reference to it. If it be the case, then the mere mention of it, on the part of Paul and Peter, is an attempt at revealing it, not hiding it. The reason they say so little about the Inner Person could be due to the fact that such spiritual mystery is too much beyond the description of words. But, other than the barrier of language in the transmission

of divine revelations, there might also be specific divine prohibitions against making them too plain or simplistic, which might risk the danger of distorting the significance and implication of the full spectrum of such revelations. Paul was specifically forbidden from speaking about the things he heard in his experience of being raptured to the third heaven – "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4). The apostle John also, after hearing the voices of the seven thunders in his apocalyptic vision, was stopped from writing them down (Revelation 10:4). Both passages clearly indicate that the Bible touches upon certain mysteries that are not permissible to be disclosed, at least not fully.

We must also keep in mind Paul's admonition that "… the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (2 Corinthians 3:6b), which indicates that if he should plainly lay bear any sacred mystery, it could very well become "the letter" that not only does not impart life, but even "kills" the spiritual life of the believer. Without the Holy Spirit's guidance, even (or perhaps especially) spiritual principles written in the Bible can become "the letter" that kills, which might just be the danger that the apostles were trying to avoid by not putting down in words too much of what they had personally realized, but intentionally leaving room for readers to explore and discover by themselves, through the life-giving Spirit of God, what is most pertinent to their individual spirituality. It is not unlike the practice of ancient Chinese artists leaving blank spaces in their paintings.[6] The Inner Person could be just another one of such mysteries, which was revealed to Paul and Peter, but was not allowed to be exposed too much. Both apostles give just a hint of the Inner Person so as to lead the aspired believers toward discovering it themselves.

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[6] This Chinese philosophy was mentioned in a class at Claremont School of Theology in 2016, entitled "Comparative Theologies and Practices: One World, Many Faiths" taught jointly by Professor Philip Clayton and John Becker as teaching assistant.

In the end, if we press the question of "why" too deeply into God's domain, the only answer might just be: "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us …" (Deuteronomy 29:29), because "it is the glory of God to conceal a thing …" (Proverbs 25:2). What can we say to argue with God about that? But, if we take the clues given by the apostles and pursue the inward course, then we may just find an invaluable spiritual treasure laying deeply inside.

Moreover, if we reflect on Chán Buddhism, especially when concerning the very critical issue of enlightenment, we find that it has the so-called "concealed saying (隱覆之說 *yǐn fù zhī shuō*)" or "esoteric meaning (密義 *mì yì*)" – something intended for the seekers to discover for and by themselves.[7] Thus, Chán is infamous for its eccentric, incomprehensible, and sometimes even inhumane *gōng àn* (公案 Jpn. *koan*), which is a collection of guidance given by Chán masters to help enlighten their pupils. Thus, analogously, perhaps Paul and Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, also deliberately designed their language to give just a hint of the Inner Person, but held back on its full divulgence, in complete accordance with their Master's spirit of teaching: "… Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. … Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matthew 13:11-13). Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who only can reveal the true meaning of the Inner Person. And it is with a prayerful heart that I write this dissertation that He grant me a sliver of such understanding to proceed unhindered.

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[7] "The real meaning of a Buddhist text or doctrine, opposite to its *prima facie* or superficial meaning." Susan Kathryn Hookham, *The Buddha Within: Tathagatagarbha Doctrine According to the Shentong Interpretation of the Ratnagotravibhaga* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991), 315. Hookham (1946–) has trained for over 50 years in the Mahamudra & Dzogchen traditions of Tibetan Buddhism and is the founding Lama of the Awakened Heart Sangha and principle teacher of the Living the Awakened Heart training.

## *Appealing to Other Religions*

If we are to decipher this mystery to render it a spiritual reality, it appears unavoidable that we should borrow from the wisdom and revelation of other religions. This assertion, *prima facie*, may sound strange, or even heretical, coming from an Evangelical, inerrantist Christian stance. However, if we delve into the Scripture more accurately, it is not difficult to find that throughout the history of the Judeo-Christian Bible, from the belief in YHWH in the pre-Christian era until the completion of the Christian New Testament, some "pagan" religious elements have been absorbed and incorporated into the Scripture. For instance, it was a well-established consensus among Hebrew Bible scholars that a section of the Book of Proverbs was sourced from Egyptian wisdom literature.[8] And, in the Christian New Testament, the apostle Paul gave a famous speech at the Areopagus to the Athenians, in which he confidently equated their "UNKNOWN GOD" to YHWH, and quoted a Greek poet as saying, "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being …" (Acts 17:28a). As if that is not enough, the apostle further cited a Cretian prophet in his epistle to Titus (1:12), proving that Paul was not an "exclusivist" who rejected all things pagan. Thus, we may conclude that this kind of adoption from other religions to enrich, complement, or complete the Judeo-Christian belief system and canons finds support in internal evidences of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments themselves. Especially in the so-called mysticism, there is an undeniable common thread running across religious borders, as Faber observes one aspect of religious pluralism:

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[8] "In Egypt the most characteristic type of wisdom book was that which is known as the Instruction. The period during which wuch books were composed was a very long one: the earliest were written well before 2000 B.C. One of the latest of them, the *Instruction of Amen-em-opet*, probably to be dated at some time between 1000 and 600 B.C., served directly as a basis for one section of Proverbs (22:17–24:22)." Roger Norman Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: Commentary by R. N. Whybray, Reader in Theology in the University of Hull* (Cambridge: Syndics of the Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), 3. Whybray (1923–1998) was Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Central Theological College, Tokyo, and then served the University of Hull as Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Studies.

> Religions in their mystical streams also often either presuppose in their history, or consciously in their formation, some kind of mutual influence and what can be called transreligious movements through different religious spheres and communities, even between east and west, of their central tenets. Despite or against their orthodox denials and efforts to suppress such a common story of the spiritual evolution, they have established themselves as an underlying heritage of humanity as a whole …[9]

Given these evidences of inter- and trans-religious reality, our underlying theme of utilizing Buddhism to enlighten the aspect of the Inner Person in Christianity should not cause any objection of syncretism, even for an Evangelical, Biblical-inerrantist Christian, if we approach it with proper comparative disciplines. In this regard, Panikkar remarks that

> … the intrareligious dialogue is itself a religious act – an act that neither unifies nor stifles but re-links us (in all directions). It takes place in the core of our being in our quest for salvific truth – in whatever sense we may understand these too-loaded words. We engage in such a dialogue not only looking above, toward a transcendent reality, or behind, toward an original tradition, but also horizontally, toward the world of other people who may believe they have found other paths leading to the realization of human destiny. The search becomes an authentic prayer, a prayer open in all directions.[10]

As for the choice of the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of East Asian Buddhism, and not other religions, to serve as a comparative vehicle, admittedly it was "co-incidental," or in Christian parlance, "providential" – a touch of the Holy Spirit, maybe. Coming from a background richly influenced by East Asian Buddhism, the author felt a natural affinity towards this tradition. For one thing, Buddhism possesses a treasure trove of myriads of scriptures about this topic, waiting to be explored. For another, the language barrier of classical Chinese texts does not present such an insurmountable obstacle. After receiving encouragement from those who have more Buddhist

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[9] Roland Faber, *The Ocean of God: On the Transreligious Future of Religions* (London: Anthem Press, 2019), 44. Faber (1960–) is Professor of Process Studies at Claremont School of Theology and Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Claremont Graduate University.

[10] Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, Revised ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), xvii. Panikkar (1918 - 2010) was a Spanish Roman Catholic priest advocating interfaith dialogue. He was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Madrid, and then Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

knowledge in this respect, it seemed all the right reasons for this comparative project are justifiably aligned.

## *Interreligious Structural Analysis*

Since the theme of this dissertation is a comparative view of two religions, it is natural and necessary to locate the project within the field of comparative religions and philosophies. In the rhetoric of interreligious dialogue, there are five commonly recognized comparative approaches or postures, describing how one views and deals with the religious other:

- Exclusivism – When a religious system "claims to offer a universal context for truth," and "not just a partial and imperfect truth, but a universal and even absolute truth," it is essentially declaring an exclusive and supreme status among religions, which does not tolerate any competition to challenge that throne. Neither is it necessary to humbly learn from others.[11]
- Inclusivism – A more open attitude toward other religious claims than exclusivism would be "to affirm at the same time that [one's own religion] includes at different levels all that there is of truth wherever it exists." In this way, there is no condemnation of others. "You can be concrete in your allegiances and universal in your outlook. … it is only you who have the privilege of an all-embracing vision and tolerant attitude … Ultimately you claim to have a fuller truth in comparison with all the others, who have only partial and relative truths."[12]
- Parallelism – A less egocentric alternative than the above two would be to consider all religions as different, parallel truths. which "meet only in the ultimate, in the eschaton, at the very end of the human pilgrimage." In this perspective, different belief systems do not

[11] Panikkar, 5.
[12] Panikkar, 6–7.

intermingle with or borrow from one another. Each is self-sufficient for its followers to reach the final destination and therefore needs not learn from others.[13]

- Interpenetration – This view would be the realization "that our neighbor's religion not only challenges and may even enrich our own, but that ultimately the very differences that separate us are somewhat potentially within the world of my own religious convictions." A logical deduction would then be the possibility for other religions to complement one's own, and that the above three positions are inadequate, because "the relation between religions is … one of a *sui generis perichoresis* or *circumincessio* [Greek and Latin terms for "unique inter-penetration"] … without the loss of the proper peculiarities of each religiousness."[14]
- Pluralism – Rejecting "absolutization," this posture maintains an open attitude to converse with all other religions, in order to dispel ignorance and misunderstanding, and to promote mutual communication. However, its goal is not uniformity or reductionism – to impose one universal religious system on all. "Pluralism stands between unrelated plurality and a monolithic unity."[15]

Among the above five stances, exclusivism should be ruled out because it rejects light from other religions, and is thus clearly contradictory to the aim of this dissertation. Inclusivism is partially applicable only in the sense that the Christian God is conceived of as the Holy One who encompasses all of the universe, a claim that similarly exists among many other world religions. But Christianity herself should not be deemed inclusive because she does not contain all truth assertions of other traditions. Parallelism also does not suit the intention here, due to its attitude of "isolationism," refusing to be enlightened by others. Interpenetration would be a good

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[13] Panikkar, 8.
[14] Panikkar, 9.
[15] Panikkar, 10.

fit because it acknowledges the inadequacy of completely relying on one's own tradition for all answers in life, and thus embraces mutual enrichment and complement. In a similar manner, pluralism, with its dialogical open-mindedness and communicative willingness, also comports with our purposes here.

Having laid out the five interreligious attitudes, Panikkar proceeds to give five "root-metaphors" or models that are "polyvalent" and conducive to dialogue: (1) the geographical model: the ways to the mountain peak, (2) the physical model: the rainbow, (3) the geometrical model: the topological invariant, (4) the anthropological model: language, and (5) the mystical model: silence.[16] Among these working models, it is the third one, the geometrical model, that best resembles the method pursued here. "Religions appear to be different and even mutually irreconcilable until or unless a topological invariant is found."[17] The case in point here is: East Asian Buddhism and Christianity seem, on the surface, diametrically opposite. However, the hypothesis of borrowing light from the Buddhist doctrine of *Tathāgatagarbha* to shine on the Christian concept of the Inner Person would not be feasible if there exists no such topological invariant between the two sides.

To explain this geometrical concept, Panikkar further introduces the concept of "homeomorphism," as opposed to analogy. The new term "represents a functional equivalence discovered through a topological transformation." Accordingly, the basis of this dissertation is the postulation that the Buddhist *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Christian Inner Person "are homeomorphic in the sense that each of them stands for something that performs an equivalent function within their respective systems." And so the comparative project becomes meaningful, as alluded to by Panikkar: "Religions that may appear at first sight to be very different from each

[16] Panikkar, 12–22.
[17] Panikkar, 17.

other may find their connections once the topological transformation is discovered that permits connecting the two traditions under consideration. … Religions do not stand side by side, but they are actually intertwined."[18]

In summary, the interreligious posture taken in this dissertation is close to that of interpenetration and pluralism. And the "topological invariant" concept of Panikkar's geometrical model sets the framework for our study in juxtaposing the Buddhist *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Christian Inner Person as "homeomorphisms" operating in their respective traditions.

## ***Methodology***

In his great evangelical discourse at Athens' Areopagus, the apostle Paul did not offensively criticize the local idols inundating the city, but "identified" their "UNKNOWN GOD" with his Judeo-Christian God, YHWH. Unlike Paul, whose purpose apparently was to minimize the distance between the local beliefs and his Gospel, the goal of our comparison is not to reduce the gap between Buddhism and Christianity, although we would be more than delighted to see that accomplished in the process. Our main goal, nevertheless, is to utilize the vehicle of "*Tathāgatagarbha* – the Eighth Consciousness" of Chán and other East Asian schools of Buddhism to illuminate the Inner Person of Christianity, so as to pave a way for truth seekers to live out this often-neglected Biblical reality. An old Chinese adage is applicable here: The stones from foreign mountains can polish local jade (他山之石可以攻玉 *tā shān zhī shí kě yǐ gōng yù*).

To compare any two things, be they physical objects or intellectual ideologies, one needs to first define the meaning, scope, and boundary of each side. This is accomplished here, firstly,

[18] Panikkar, 17–18.

by analyzing the Christian concept of the Inner Person through the exegesis of some modern theologians. The presupposition here, though somewhat against the grain of certain modern Biblical criticisms, is that the traditionally recognized "Pauline Epistles" and "Petrine Epistles" are written by the apostles Paul and Peter, respectively. Arguments for or against their authentic authorship are another broad subject beyond the scope of this research, but they do not adversely affect our analysis at all. Hence, throughout this dissertation, it is assumed that three of the four occurrences of the term *inner person* are of Pauline origin and the remaining one of Petrine origin.

For an in-depth understanding of the four major Biblical passages, indispensible is studying contemporary exegesis and theological anthropology. This will help us better define the Inner Person and its locus. After the theological exposition on the Christian concept of the Inner Person, we will proceed to draw from the experience of three Christian "contemplatives" who also demonstrate how Christians might connect with and develop their inner spirituality, or what I deem the Inner Person. Then we will examine the Buddhist *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine for any helpful clues. Combining these Buddhist and Christian sources of inspiration, perhaps the mysterious veil of the Inner Person can be lifted somewhat. But even if that purpose is not completely achieved, the hope is that the Inner Person can at least become an abiding awareness or a slightly accessible reality in the aspiring Christian's life and assist her in the long pilgrim's journey.

The approach to the *Tathāgatagarbha* discourse of Buddhism is carried out through studying one of the most significant *Tathāgatagarbha Sutras* (so-called collectively because they all elucidate the mystical *Tathāgatagarbha* in various aspects), viz. the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (MMPNS or *Nirvāna Sūtra* for short). This study will utilize mostly the

*sūtra*'s Chinese rendering, constantly referencing its English translations and commentaries. Existing English translations of this *sūtra* primarily consist of two works: Mark Laurence Blum's partial translation (only vol. 1, from the beginning to T12n0374_p0428a in the Taisho database index) and Kosho Yamamoto's full translation, both of which have been translated from the same Dharmakshema's Chinese version.[19, 20]

Early original *Tathāgatagarbha* sources in India are known to be recorded in two strains, the *Yogacara* School and the *Tathāgatagarbha* literature, the latter of which, unlike the former, did not form any particular sect or school, but consists of a corpus of *sūtras* on the theme of "the inherence of the *Tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings." The choice of this *Nirvāna Sūtra* is based on, among other considerations, the fact that it appears to be one of the earliest such writings, thus giving us a glimpse of the formulation in its most "primal" mode.[21] A remark should be made that, of the *Yogacara* School's three branches, one which follows the teaching of Dharmapala and Xuán Zàng, denies the universality of Buddha nature. But this branch, 法相宗 *Fǎ Xiàng Zōng* (lit. Dharma Characteristic), is not considered mainstream *Yogacara* thought.[22] Additionally, the Buddhist foundational notions of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness), which lead to the logical conclusion of the non-substantiality of the Self (encompassing the Buddha nature) is also investigated as a potential objection to likening the *Tathāgatagarbha* to the Christian Inner Person.

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[19] Mark Laurence Blum, trans., *The Nirvana Sutra (Mahāparinirvāṇa-Sūtra)*, vol. 1, BDK English Tripiṭaka Series (Berkeley: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, 2015). Blum (1950–) is Professor of Japanese at the State University of New York at Albany.

[20] Tony Page, ed., *The Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, rev. ed., trans. Kosho Yamamoto (self-published, Do1@yandex.ru, 2007), Adobe PDF eBook, http://www.shabkar.org/download/pdf/Mahaparinirvana_Sutra_Yamamoto_Page_2007.pdf. Dharmakṣema (曇無讖 Tán Wú Càn 385–433) was a Buddhist monk from Magadha in India. Yamamoto was a scholar of Buddhist Studies. He is the author/translator of numerous important Buddhist works.

[21] Sallie B. King, *Buddha Nature*, first Indian ed. (Delhi: Sri Satguru, 1992), 5–13. King (1952–) is Emerita Professor of Religion at James Madison University in Virginia.

[22] King, 2.

After discussing the Christian concept of the Inner Person and the Buddhist teaching on the *Tathāgatagarbha*, each on its own terms without any "syncretism," we then are able to draw conceptual connections from our understanding of both sides. Again, the emphasis is on how the particular Christian notion of Inner Person, in various aspects which we have acquired in our earlier exegetical analysis, may gain enlightenment from Chán and East Asian Buddhism. Although the aim is unilateral, in the sense that these Buddhist doctrines will be used as a guiding light to explore the depth of the one aspect of Christianity, it is inevitable that in any proper comparative enterprise, the benefits thus engendered would most probably be mutual and bilateral. And yet, since neither side is authoritative over the counterpart, any analogies drawn between the two should not be viewed as corrective or normative, but rather, informative, constructive and transformative.

Two major tasks serve as the overarching guiding principle of this project: (1) defining the Christian concept of the Inner Person as exclusively applicable to this study; and (2) building a model of illumination for this comparative work by studying one or more Buddhist *sūtras* which have similar or parallel concepts. These are briefly described below:

## A Definition of the Inner Person in Christianity

From an Evangelical Protestant viewpoint, the Christian concept of the Inner Person as applicable to this dissertation is reached in three ways:

Analyzing Exegesis: Modern theologians, such as Rudolf Bultmann, James D. G. Dunn, George E. Ladd and others, will be used to gain insights on the four main scriptural references of the Inner Person.

Studying Spiritual Writers: From the experiences of three past saints who were able to communicate fluently with God, the hope is to summarize a pattern of the role of the Inner Person in establishing the divine-human link. The three saints from Christian history to be examined are: Augustine of Hippo (Patristic period), Teresa of Avila (Medieval age), and Catherine of Genoa (also Medieval period), as representing some important inner cosmos in the saints of the Christian past. Possibly, their revealed experiences of the interior world and intricacies in communion with God could collectively help us build a working definition of the Inner Person.

Researching Theological Anthropology: Since we are exploring the topic of the human interior, it would be appropriate, beneficial, and even indispensible to allow the perspective of Christian theological anthropology to inform and help build our definition of the Inner Person. Also unavoidable is a brief excursion on the topic of the debate on dichotomy (body and soul) vs. trichotomy (body, soul, and spirit) so as to make a better estimation on the locus and functionality of the Inner Person.

From these three sources a working definition of the Inner Person will be established as the foundation of this comparative study.

## A Model of Illumination from Buddhism

The four most significant Tathāgatagarbha Sutras in the early development of the doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha are deemed to be: the Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra, the Anūnatvā Apūrṇatva Nirdeśa Parivarta, the Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Sūtra and the Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra.[23] Although the MMPNS is not regarded as presenting any essential new

[23] King, 12.

concepts concerning the Tathagatagarbha teaching that are noticeably different from the other three early Scriptures, it is selected to be the main Buddhist sūtra for study in this dissertation, for the reasons that (1) it is highly influential, even controversial, in the development of Buddhism in China, resulting in a rich repertoire of commentaries; (2) as Sallie King states, "it tends to be rather unsystematic and seems to speak with many voices. This very imprecision, however, made the text a fruitful one for later students and commentators, who were obliged to create their own order and bring it to the text"; (3) it accentuates the Buddha's eternity, in contradistinction to the "blown out" narration of nirvāna; and (4) consequently, this Scripture makes the connection or identification between buddhadhātu (Buddha nature, roughly) and Tathāgatagarbha.[24] These features of the MMPNS make it potentially quite favorable to our comparative project, and are certainly conducive to building a model for our study.

Albeit a controversial doctrine, the teaching that the Buddha nature is inherent in all sentient beings is upheld in many East Asian Buddhist schools for many centuries. It is my hope to be able to deduce from this Buddha-nature doctrine, within the scope of this *Nirvāna Sūtra*, a version of "Buddhist anthropology or psychology" – again, from my understanding of this *sūtra*, without any claim of universality – to serve as the model of comparison with the working definition of the Inner Person. To fortify the argument for the validity of this model, at certain critical junctures, it may be helpful or necessary to reference other important *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras*.

It is from these two points of approach, viz. a working definition of the Inner Person in the New Testament and a model of illumination based on the Buddha nature, that this

[24] King, 13–14.

dissertation will be carried out, that the Christian concept of the Inner Person might be comprehended in a new light given by the Buddhism analysis.

## *My Understanding of the Bible*

It would be helpful to state my Christian stance, and especially my view of the Bible, from the beginning, so the reader may understand better why my line of reasoning runs the way it does in the entire dissertation.

### My Theological Stance about the Bible

Like many Christian Evangelicals, I considered myself to hold the view of "Biblical inerrancy," and the Reformed doctrine of "perspicuity of the Scripture," which does not imply a "total clarity" of the Bible without any mysteries, as elucidated below. This theological stance about the Bible can be summed up by the following points:

1. The Bible is a spiritual canon, breathed out by the Holy Spirit (θεόπνευστος, "*theos*, 'God,' *pneuo*, 'to breathe'"; cf. 2 Timothy 3:16), and therefore it is unlike any purely human-authored book in the world.[25]

   **Corollary A**: As a book breathed out by God, the Bible represents the authority and truthfulness of God, even though all the authors are fallible human beings. Therefore, the word *inerrancy* may be properly ascribed to it (see next subsection for further explanation of this doctrine).

[25] James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), s.v. "2315. θεόπνευστος." Strong (1822–1894) was a biblical scholar, lexicographer, and Methodist theologian. He was President and Professor of Biblical Literature at Troy University, and then Professor of Exegetical Theology at Drew Theological Seminary.

**Corollary B**: The Bible contains innumerable concepts that are not found, not understood, and not comprehensible by secular earthlings, because these things are only "spiritually discerned" by the spiritual person (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14).

**Corollary C**: Although the meaning of certain truths, such as Jesus' salvation, is laid out plainly (what Luther calls "external clarity"), the Book still contains many other things related to God, His Church, humanity, and the end times, which can only be comprehended by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, or the opening of understanding (νοῦς, mind; cf. Luke 24:45) by Him.

**Corollary D**: Since comprehension completely depends on the Holy Spirit, one can never expect to fully understand the Bible through studying alone, per se, or other peripheral information, such as its history, archeology, literary analysis, etc. Familiarity with the Bible is a buildup of wealth for the Holy Spirit's disposal to enlighten us; and peripheral information has only a very limited value in the whole scheme of understanding the Bible.

2. Perspicuity of the Scripture: This theory not only pertains to the core thrust of Jesus' salvation and maybe other simpler aspects, such as direct moral teachings, but also to the deeper essence relating to God and His plan for humanity and the universe. The former is what Luther calls, "external clarity" – "Externally, the content of the biblical message is altogether discernible."[26] See later subsection for a more detailed discussion.

   **Corollary A**: Therefore, before being enlightened by the Holy Spirit, one cannot just "apply" what "the Bible says," since one cannot be sure whom the Bible is speaking to, for what occasions, to what purpose, etc.

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[26] Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 446. Barth (1939–) is professor emeritus of systematic theology and philosophy of religion, Faculty of Protestant Theology at Philipps-University in Marburg, Germany.

**Corollary B**: The Roman Catholic doctrine of the church being the sole authority of Biblical interpretation is unbiblical, since there is no warrant that the church is wholly controlled by the Holy Spirit and knows each individual Christian's situation and condition. Only God is the authority of His Word. The church cannot appoint itself as the vicar of God in this regard.

3. In responding to the Reformed belief that "when the Bible speaks, God speaks," the question must be raised as to what constitutes "the Bible speaking." Is it just our literal perception and understanding when reading the text? Is it a whimsical, arbitrary glance of a verse by a random opening of the Scripture? Or is it the true, individually pertinent "*rhema*" spoken by the Holy Spirit? (On the difference between λόγος – *logos* and ῥήμα – *rhema*, see appendix A).
4. In responding to Martin Luther's assertion that there can only be one meaning in the Scriptures, it can be observed plainly that the Bible itself contains truths that are many-sided, which the Holy Spirit can utilize to enlighten someone with certain aspect of the truth, but another person with other aspects. The Book of Proverbs attests thus: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit" (Proverbs 26:4-5). If there is only one meaning, which of these two verses is the right way to follow when one encounters a fool? But God's "*rhema*" can teach each person different things from the same "*logos*" recorded in the Bible. As Tozer rightly observed, "truth is like a bird; it cannot fly on one wing."[27] Chinese daoists of old also had this vision when they devised the so-called *tài jí* or *yīn yáng* symbol of black and white entanglement, in which nothing is so clear-cut, since each side also contains the color of the opposite side.

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[27] Aiden Wilson Tozer, *That Incredible Christian* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian, 1964), 59. Tozer (1897–1963) was a self-educated Evangelical pastor and influential writer who received honorary doctorates from Wheaton and Houghton colleges.

5. In response to Luther's claim, "*Sacra scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Holy Scripture is its own interpreter)," and Augustine's assertion that "Practically nothing is dug out from those unintelligible texts which is not discovered to be said very plainly in another place."[28, 29] There are still many difficult or unexplainable, or even "conflicting" places in the Bible that are not explained in other places in the Bible. See the perspicuity subsection for details.

In summary, this way of understanding the Biblical message might be called "esoteric" (from Gk. ἐσώτερος, meaning "interior"), if, and only if, the word takes on its original meaning of "interior," since the Holy Spirit is an indwelling Spirit in the Christian and he or she must turn inward to heed the subtle voice of His. But this understanding is not "esoteric" in the modern sense of "secretive," as in privileged knowledge known by or preserved for only the initiated, or knowledge that is contrary to the doctrines of most recognized, orthodox churches, because nothing is artificially concealed, and no one is especially privileged to the knowledge, except at the disposal of the Holy Spirit. Particularly to be noted is that this view of the Bible completely conforms to the understanding of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Furthermore, this Biblical epistemological approach might also be described as "mystical," in the sense that the Holy Spirit Himself is a great mystery. But, it is NOT "mysterious" as in humanly conjured-up secret symbolism or "esoteric" as in clandestine teaching for the initiated. Neither can this understanding be described as Gnosticism, which, according to the Dutch Calvinist theologian, Herman Bavinck, "did not just reject the OT but applied the allegorical method to the NT,

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[28] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 68. Bayer (1939–) is a German Lutheran theologian, and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of the Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen, Germany.

[29] Saint Augustine, "Christian Instruction," in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, trans. John J. Gavigan, vol. 4, *Writings of Saint Augustine* (New York: Cima, 1947), 66.

attempting thereby to harmonize its system with Scripture. Here the perceptible forms and historical facts only have symbolic meaning."[30]

As to the timing of individual revelations granted by the Holy Spirit, no one is privy to such information – "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Furthermore, what the Holy Spirit reveals to each person are "personal mysteries" that are oftentimes ineffable or impermissible to be disclosed, just as the apostle Paul "… was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Having established my Biblical posture, throughout this treatise I use quotes from both of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments, treating them as supporting evidences of the utmost authority, without considering the veracity of various modern theories of higher Biblical criticism such as the documentary hypothesis or the historical criticism. Furthermore, the overall Christian stance of this dissertation can be considered "evangelical." The term comes from the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον*, originally meaning "a reward for good tidings; later, the idea of reward dropped, and the word stood for 'the good news' itself."[31] Evangelicalism has been widely used to describe Christians who loosely fit the description of a revival movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in England and America, spreading to other English-speaking countries. "Central to the evangelical gospel was the proclamation of Christ's saving work through his

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[30] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 466. Bavinck (1854–1921) was a Dutch Calvinist theologian and Professor of Dogmatics at Theological School in Kampen, Holland, then Professor of Theology at the Free University in Amsterdam.

[31] Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "2098. εὐαγγέλιον."

death on the cross and the necessity of personally trusting him for eternal salvation."[32] Marsden also adds: "The essential evangelical beliefs include (l) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible, (2) the real historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture, (3) salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ, (4) the importance of evangelism and missions, and (5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life."[33] Broadly speaking, these tenets can be considered to be harmonious with the Christian presuppositions contained herein.

## Inerrancy of Scriptures – What It Entails

Biblical inerrancy is a hotly debated topic, even among evangelicals. Below is an excerpt from the "Short Statement" of The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy established in 1978:

> 1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.
>
> 2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms, obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.
>
> 3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.
>
> 4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.
>
> 5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary

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[32] George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 2. Marsden (1939–) is Professor Emeritus at the Department of History of the University of Notre Dame. Marsden (1939–) is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame.

[33] Marsden, 4–5.

> to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.[34]

In my view, not as a critique, but as a suggestion and emphasis, point two above should be predicated upon point three. That is to say, to take the teachings of the Bible and apply them to oneself necessitates the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is because the Bible itself is God's objective Word (Λόγος), which only become subjective when the Holy Spirit enlightens the reader (see Appendix A for the distinction between λόγος and ῥήμα). For example, in the monumental book that gave rise to the namesake movement *The Imitation of Christ*, Kempis begins by saying: "'He who follows Me, walks not in darkness,' says the Lord (John 8:12). By these words of Christ we are advised to imitate His life and habits, if we wish to be truly enlightened and free from all blindness of heart. Let our chief effort, therefore, be to study the life of Jesus Christ."[35] To know the life of the Savior well is certainly a must for any serious Christian, just to familiarize oneself with the facts surrounding His Incarnation. But Jesus' time and ours are separated by two millennia, and most of us do not even live near Palestine. How, then, do we imitate Him with such circumstantial and chronological gaps? In the same vein, a popular and well-intended Christian encouragement in vogue is: "What would Jesus do?" However, Jesus is very different from all of us. His status, missions, surroundings, social milieu are all drastically unique from ours. What Jesus would have done mostly has little to do with our daily speech and acts. How are we to know that if Jesus lives in the flesh on earth now, what He would have done? Are we not too presumptuous about Him? Would it not be more pertinent to ask: "What does the Holy Spirit teach me to do in this matter, at the present moment?"

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[34] "Chicago_Statement.Pdf," accessed October 7, 2022, https://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf.

[35] Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1949), 5. À Kempis (c. 1380–1471) was a priest living in a religious order community, a member of the Modern Devotion movement, and a follower of the Brethren of the Common Life.

Biblical inerrancy has its root from the patristic era, notably from Augustine. "The influence of Augustine in regard to inspiration and inerrancy remained decisive throughout the middle ages and right up to modern times."[36] He insisted, contra Jerome, that "as a nonnegotiable church doctrine that there are no errors in sacred Scripture," saying that "the most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books … If you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement … there will not be left a single sentence of those books which … may not by the same fatal rule be explained away." Thus Woodbridge asserts that "it is clear the Bishop of Hippo believed the Bible is 'true' through and through. It is without error, or, if you will, inerrant."[37] In the Reformation era, this doctrine was not yet formed. Martin Luther "recognized mistakes and inconsistencies in Scripture and treated them with lofty indifference because they did not touch the heart of the Gospel."[38] Another famous reformer, Jean Calvin "like Luther was quite ready to recognize manifest error in the New Testament, in a citation from the Old Testament and in matters of chronology. He would not hold the Holy Ghost responsible for every *dagesh forte*."[39]

It was surprising that the first to "raise the stakes" in the Catholic-Protestant debates on the Scripture should be an Italian Jesuit and cardinal, Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), who "argued that the Bible was without error in all matters: 'There can be no error in Scripture, whether it deals with faith or with morals/mores, or whether it states something general and

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[36] Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Inquiry*, trans. Edward Quinn (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 217. Küng (1928–2021) was a Swiss theologian. He had taught at the University of Tübingen as professor of ecumenical theology.

[37] John D. Woodbridge, "Evangelical Self-Identity and the Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 111. Woodbridge is Research Professor of Church History and the History of Christian Thought at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

[38] Roland H. Bainton, "The West from the Reformation to the Present Day," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. Stanley L. Greenslade, reprint, vol. 3, *The Bible in the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976), 12. Bainton (1894–1984) was Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale University.

[39] Bainton, 13.

common to the whole Church, or something particular and pertaining to only one person.'"[40] Not to be outdone, "Protestant theologians responded to Bellarmine's innovation in kind, affirming the uniform inerrancy of Scripture for their own apologetic ends."[41] Later, inerrancy becomes one of the traits in the Reformers' doctrine of the Scripture – "the perfection or sufficiency of Holy Scripture" – to counter the claims of Rome about the necessity of tradition in addition to the Bible.[42] Accurately understood, the Reformed doctrine states that the Scripture "completely contains 'the articles of faith' (*articuli fidei*), 'the matters necessary to salvation,'" but not all that had been said or written by the prophets, Christ, or the apostles, nor "all the practices, ceremonies, rules, and regulations that the church needs for its organization."[43] In other words, the Scripture is self-sufficient only insofar as salvation (in the form of Christian believing) is concerned, meaning that if a diligent seeker should study it carefully with an open heart toward God, the salvific messages contained therein are unmistakable and undeniable, and are sufficient to be relied upon as the Word of God. However, such self-sufficiency does not imply that *all* concepts, proclamations, teachings, precepts, parables, messages etc. found in the Bible are clearly and plainly demonstrated or explained, such that there exist no difficult (so-called "dark") passages.

On the contrary, the Scriptural difficulties as a whole constitute divine mysteries that God sovereignly purposes to conceal, partially or entirely, until the appointed times, only to be opened to the foreordained persons. While we are on earth, there are bound to be many, many sacred mysteries that are beyond our comprehension, but our hope is that if we persevere until

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[40] Ronald Hendel, "The Dream of a Perfect Text: Textual Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy in Early Modern Europe," in *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*, ed. Benjamin Wright et al., vol. 1, *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy* (Leiden, Neth.: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2017), 526. Hendel (1950–) is Dabby Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

[41] Hendel, 1:529.

[42] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:481.

[43] Bavinck, 1:488.

the end of time, all these mysteries will be revealed, as the apostle Paul teaches: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Even so, there also exist certain truths that can be discovered through our diligent seeking, the Inner Person being one of such, as proposed in this dissertation. Since, by God's grace, whatever new discoveries we shall gain in this subject can only be truly verified at the eschaton, such knowledge could perhaps be categorized as "proleptic," to borrow the word that Pannenberg uses to describe the earthly Jesus' self-proclamation of divine authority. His explanation of this term is that "Jesus' claim means an anticipation of a confirmation that is to be expected only from the future."[44] Professor Clayton notes that the word *prolepsis* "traditionally … has connoted little more than the sense of anticipation," and in Pannenberg's book, *Jesus – God and Man*, "the word *proleptic* is used … in contexts that refer to the eschaton as having 'already begun' or 'already happened' … in Jesus."[45] Because the Christian's hope of glory lies in the end of the present world, when the "natural body" that "is sown" now "is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44a), it is also at that moment that the Inner Person is fully manifest and realized. Therefore, by Pannenberg's analogy, any insight of the Inner Person that we gain now, by God's grace, in addition to what the New Testament reveals, should qualify as proleptic knowledge. It is based on the recognition of this unique, mystical characteristic of the Scripture that this dissertation approaches the mystery of the Inner Person with reverence and awe.

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[44] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus - God and Man*, 2nd ed., trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 58. Pannenberg (1928–2014) was a German Lutheran theologian and held several professorships: Professor of Systematic Theology at the Kirchliche Hochschule Wuppertal, a professor at Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, and Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Munich in Germany.

[45] Philip Clayton, "Anticipation and Theological Method," in *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg: Twelve American Critiques, with an Autobiographical Essay and Response*, ed. Philip Clayton and Carl E. Braaten (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub., 1988), 129–30. Italics original. Clayton (1956–) taught or held research professorships at Williams College, California State University, Harvard University, Cambridge University, and the University of Munich. He is now Ingraham Professor of Theology at Claremont School of Theology.

To sum up the Reformed view of Biblical inerrancy that is adopted by this dissertation, the description of "objective inerrancy" would perhaps be appropriate, because, according to Bavinck, human history is divided into two great periods, or dispensations, in regards to God's revelation: the first "is predominantly a revelation of God in Christ. It bears an objective character."[46] After Jesus Christ's resurrection and ascension, "The dispensation of the Son then makes way for the dispensation of the Spirit. Objective revelation passes into subjective appropriation."[47] And in this current dispensation of the Holy Spirit, the Scripture is His indispensible, objective tool to guide the individual Christian "into all truth" (John 16:13), making the Word of God a subjective reality in the lives of the believers. Pertaining to our discussion here, this subjective and wonderful task of the Holy Spirit could very well be carried out in the Inner Person, since it should be a divine work within the deepest part of our being. Therefore, to perceive the "still small voice" (cf. 1 Kings 19:12) of the Holy Spirit is no trivial thing for the Christian. The exploration of the possibility of this discernment is also one of the major reasons for writing this particular dissertation.

## Perspicuity of the Bible – a Survey of Reformed Theologians

One issue in particular that is also quite relevant to this dissertation is the doctrine of the so-called "perspicuity of the Bible," formulated during the 16th century Reformation as influenced by the contemporary humanism and in protest to the Scripture's institutional domination by the Roman Catholic church.[48] Armed with the conviction, "that all people, whether ploughboy or king, could understand the message of God's Word," the Reformers honed

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[46] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:382.

[47] Bavinck, 1:383.

[48] T. D. F. Maddox, "Scripture, Perspicuity, and Postmodernity," *Review & Expositor* 100, no. 4 (December 1, 2003): 558–59, https://doi.org/10.1177/003463730310000402. Maddox teaches theology and philosophy.

their translational arsenal, made their upmost endeavor, and eventually succeeded to put the vernacular Bible in the hands of the lay commoners.[49] To a great extent, they followed the declaration of Augustine, "The Holy Ghost, therefore, has generously and advantageously planned Holy Scripture in such a way that in the easier passages He relieves our hunger; in the ones that are harder to understand He drives away our pride. Practically nothing is dug out from those unintelligible texts which is not discovered to be said very plainly in another place."[50]

In similar manner, the Baptist theologian, John L. Dagg remarks, "The authority of the Bible is *immediate*. Its address is directly from God, and directly to the mind and heart of every individual reader. We have no mediator but Christ, and no infallible interpreter but the Holy Spirit. … We should employ our own minds in the study of God's Word, and allow no human interpreter to intervene between God and our own conscience."[51] In early twentieth century, Strong echoes this view: "What then is the Bible? It is the personal message of the personal God to each one of us as persons, and by our personal treatment of it we are to be judged at the last day."[52]

These statements prompt the question: if God's Word is so "immediate" and "personal" in His Biblical messages, then why does the apostle Paul say that God sets in the church "… some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Ephesians 4:11, cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28)? Are these ecclesiastical positions not essentially different levels of God's messengers to transmit His messages to the laity and unbelievers? If the Bible is

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[49] Kristian Brackett, "The Perspicuity of the Scriptures: Presupposition, Principle or Phantasm," *Biblijski Institut, Zagreb*, 2010, 31. Brackett is dean of the Master's Academy International in Croatia.

[50] Saint Augustine, "Christian Instruction," 4:66.

[51] John Leadley Dagg, *Manual of Theology: First Part, A Treatise on Christian Doctrine* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Pub. Society, 1859), 41. Italics original. Dagg (1794–1884) served as President and professor of theology at Mercer University in Georgia.

[52] August Hopkins Strong, *What Shall I Believe? A Primer of Christian Theology* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1922), 59. Strong (1836–1921) was Present of the Rochester Theological Seminary (later Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School).

completely transparent to all, or at least to the Christian, can we not eliminate all these positions, save the evangelists? Due to (perhaps the wrong impression of) the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture, some corollaries are inevitably deduced, among which is the responsibility of Christians to "walk the walk," since it is assumed that they will easily receive God's messages from the Bible. In this regard, Fee and Stuart explicate the Christian's most urgent issue: "… the Bible need not be an obscure book if read and studied properly. In fact we are convinced that the single most serious problem people have with the Bible is not with a lack of understanding but with the fact that they understand many things too well! … the problem is not understanding it but obeying it – putting it into practice."[53] These two authors make it seem almost natural and effortless to unpack the Scripture: "The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the 'plain meaning of the text,' the author's intended meaning. And the most important ingredient one brings to this task is *an enlightened common sense*. The test of good interpretation is that it makes good sense of what is written."[54] But what is "an enlightened common sense"? Do all Christians automatically possess it when they were born again? As a comparison, Buddhists would spend all their lifetime (some would even say, myriads of lifetimes) in the pursuit of enlightenment. Although the great divide between the two traditions prevents us from directly equating the concept of enlightenment on both sides, can we Christians casually talk about this particular state of being as though it is a *de facto* status after a person's sincere confession and subsequent baptism? Is "an enlightened common sense" so easy to come by, even for the sincere Christian?

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[53] Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Fourth ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 21. Fee (1934–) is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. Stuart (1943–) is Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

[54] Fee and Stuart, 22. Italics added.

However, Fee and Stuart do caution us about our own, private exegesis: "… every reader is at the same time an interpreter. … we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas. Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, *leads us astray*, or else causes us to *read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text*."[55] And they admit that the "plain meaning" of Scripture is difficult to harmonize universally: "A simple look at the contemporary church … makes it abundantly clear that not all 'plain meanings' are equally plain to all."[56] In other words, they ultimately have to acknowledge that the Scripture is not so plain in meaning, after all.

The nineteenth-century Reformed theologian, Charles Hodge interprets the doctrine in an uncompromising way: "The Bible is a plain book. It is intelligible by the people. And they have the right, and are bound to read and interpret it for themselves; so that their faith may rest on the testimony of the Scriptures, and not on that of the Church. Such is the doctrine of Protestants on this subject." However, he also recognizes the existence of difficulties in the Bible, so that "they require diligent study; that all men need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to right knowledge and true faith. But it is maintained that in all things necessary to salvation they are sufficiently plain to be understood even by the unlearned."[57] This makes Hodge conformant to the Westminster Confession: "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient

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[55] Fee and Stuart, 22. Italics added.

[56] Fee and Stuart, 23.

[57] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1871), 183–84. Hodge (1797–1878) was a Reformed Presbyterian theologian; he had served as professor and principal at Princeton Theological Seminary.

understanding of them."[58] With the proviso of difficult passages in the Bible, it should, therefore, not be called "a plain book."

But Bracket thinks such limitation of perspicuity to only the messages of salvation is unwarranted. He deems the Westminster divines "have unnecessarily limited their definition in comparison to others." Hence, he "agrees with those definitions which state that the perspicuous nature of God's revelation applies to its general content and not to just those matters which pertain to salvation. The whole of the Bible is light and the believer can read all of it in order to gain instruction, insight and blessing."[59] In the same camp is also Grudem. Agreeing with Bracket, he stated: "The clarity of Scripture means that the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God's help and being willing to follow it."[60] And even more emphatic is Callahan:

> Scripture can be and is read with profit, with appreciation and with transformative results. It is *open* and *transparent* to earnest readers; it is *intelligible* and *comprehensible* to attentive readers. Scripture itself is *coherent* and *obvious*. It is *direct* and *unambiguous* as written; what is written is *sufficient*. Scripture's concern or focal point is readily presented as the redemptive story of God. … All this is to say: Scripture is clear about what it is about.[61]

However, Callahan does subsequently supplement the above with conditions: "Scripture is filled with details of great variety. Some are admittedly simple and others consciously mysterious, yet not all are clear, even to the learned. And even though 'ordinary means' are

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[58] "Westminster Confession of Faith," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 6.007, accessed September 19, 2022, https://ccel.org/ccel/anonymous/westminster3/westminster3.i.i.html?highlight=All%20things%20in%20Scripture%20are%20not%20alike%20plain%20&queryID=20999518&resultID=50746#highlight.

[59] Brackett, "The Perspicuity of the Scriptures: Presupposition, Principle or Phantasm," 34.

[60] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 108. Grudem (1948–) is Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary in Arizona.

[61] James Patrick Callahan, *The Clarity of Scripture: History, Theology & Contemporary Literary Studies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 9. Italics added for emphasis. Callahan (1960–) is adjunct professor of theology at Elmhurst College in Illinois.

employed, this is no guarantee …."[62] In effect, this latter assertion negates whatever *clarity* he had claimed previously.

What does the great Reformer, Martin Luther, have to say about this subject? In his *De Servo Arbitrio* (*The Bondage of Will*, 1525), in responding to Erasmus' "skeptical humanism," Luther cleverly posits two types of Biblical clarity, external and internal.

> The clarity of Scripture is twofold, just as its darkness has a twofold character: The one, the external, is placed in service of the spoken word; the other is located in the knowledge of the heart. If you speak about an inner clarity, no human being can consider even an *iota* of Scripture to be true, unless he has the Spirit of God. … The [Holy] Spirit is namely necessary for understanding the entire Scripture and every single one of its beloved parts. If you speak of the *external* [clarity], nothing remains that is dark or that can have two meanings; instead, everything is placed into the light through the Word and what is in Scripture is announced to the entire world.[63]

However, this distinction is not a separation, but an inter-dependence, because "this inner clarity of the Spirit does not come except by means of the external Word. Only by placing trust in the external Word and the authority of Jesus Christ that is operative therein, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can one read the Bible as Holy Scripture."[64]

Bayer contrasts Erasmus with Luther this way:

> Whereas Erasmus argued that what does not make sense on the basis of its external wording was simply to be left to its own devices and honored 'in mystical silence,' Luther accentuated the relationship between the external and the internal: the external clarity of Scripture (*claritas externa scripturae*) is sufficient, in spite of the dark passages, for one to recognize Christ as its center point.

If this is the only contention between Erasmus and Luther, then they actually do not contradict each other, because Luther also acknowledges the existence of "dark passages" that requires further enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, and Erasmus' "mystical silence" does not exclude such divine revelation.

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[62] Callahan, 10.

[63] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 83–84. Italics original.

[64] Bayer, 85.

More balanced views can be found in other systematic theologians, as they formulated the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture to include Biblical mysteries. For example, from Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, we find the following:

> … the Reformers stressed the perspicuity of Scripture. They did not intend to deny that *there are mysteries in the Bible which transcend human reason*, but freely admitted this. Neither did they claim such clarity for Scripture that the interpreter can well dispense with scientific exegesis. … Moreover, they did not even assert that the way of salvation is so clearly revealed in Scripture that every man, whether he be enlightened by the Holy Spirit or not, and whether or not he be deeply interested in the way of salvation, can easily understand it. Their contention was simply that the knowledge necessary unto salvation, though not equally clear on every page of Scripture, is yet conveyed to man throughout the Bible in such a simple and comprehensible form that one who is earnestly seeking salvation can, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by reading and studying the Bible, easily obtain for himself the necessary knowledge, and does not need the aid and guidance of the Church and of a separate priesthood.[65]

In similar fashion, Bavinck states the doctrine to dispel the misconception about the Scripture being completely clear of difficulties:

> The doctrine of the perspicuity of Holy Scripture has frequently been misunderstood and misrepresented, both by Protestants and Catholics. It does not mean that the matters and subjects with which Scripture deals are not *mysteries that far exceed the reach of the human intellect*. Nor does it assert that Scripture is clear in all its parts, so that no scientific exegesis is needed, or that, also in its doctrine of salvation, Scripture is plain and clear to every person without distinction. It means only that the truth, the knowledge of which is necessary to everyone for salvation, though not spelled out with equal clarity on every page of Scripture, is nevertheless presented throughout all of Scripture in such a simple and intelligible form that a person concerned about the salvation of his or her soul can easily, by personal reading and study, learn to know that truth from Scripture without the assistance and guidance of the church and the priest. The way of salvation, not as it concerns the matter itself but as it concerns the mode of transmission, has been clearly set down there for the reader desirous of salvation. While that reader may not understand the "how" (πως) of it, the "that" (ὅτι) is clear.[66]

In summary, Reformed theologians from Luther and on mostly insist on the perspicuity of the Scripture as far as salvational messages are concerned. But, they also admit that there are

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[65] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 167. Italics added for emphasis.

[66] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:477. Italics added for emphasis.

difficult, or "dark," passages in the Bible that are deep mysteries beyond the intellect's power of understanding and decipherment. If so, then the Inner Person would be one of such well-concealed mysteries of the Scripture. It bears repeating that this understanding should NOT be construed as "esoteric" in the modern sense, which has departed from its original Greek meaning of "interiority", but now is defined, for instance, in the following way:

> Today, esotericism (Gk ἐσωτερικόν/esoterikon, "the internal") encompasses all those writings, doctrines and practices that either (1), to the extent that they involve religious matters, *contradict the declared doctrines of the churches* or (2), to the extent that they understand themselves as knowledge, are *irreconcilable with the knowledge and methods of science* and, consequently, claim to be "higher knowledge," or (3) whatever can be sold on the esoteric market as esotericism.[67]

These modern criteria for esotericism definitively does not represent the position and intention in this dissertation. The present author's posture on the Bible is closely aligned with the Reformed doctrine of the Scripture. Such would be a major presupposition of this dissertation whenever Biblical support is invoked.

## Does the Bible Itself Teach about God's Mystery?

If we assume, with Luther and other Reformers, that the Scripture is mostly clear about its messages, except in difficult places, then it is possible to see what, or whether, it clearly teaches about certain properties of its divine messages in both Testaments. In the following, Biblical quotations will only be taken in their basic, literal meaning that is plain, literal and "externally perspicuous."

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[67] Hartmut Zinser, "Esotericism," in *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2008), s.v. "Esotericism." Italics added for emphasis. Zinser (1944–) is a professor at the Institute for the Scientific Study of Religion at the Free University of Berlin.

*In the Old Testament*

**The Attributes of YHWH** – "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). Although the purpose of this verse is to call attention to the things revealed, it still elucidates the notion that above and beyond them exist certain secret, hidden things of God. It is only properly so because He is transcendent beyond comprehension.

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). Whether God intentionally "conceals" things about Himself, there is no extra effort involved on His part, because anything relating to the divine ontology is necessarily hidden, unless He endeavors to reveal them. Similarly, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour" (Isaiah 45:15). Hiddenness is thus a proper attribute of the transcendent God.

**The Word of YHWH** – "And He said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isaiah 6:9-10). Before the Israelites' capture, God pronounced His punishment, that however strenuously they might exercise their faculties of the ear, eye, and mind, they still would find no way to understand His Word "with their heart (לֵבָב)." Note that this lack of understanding pertains to God's message of salvation ("convert and be healed"). Is this, then, contradictory to the Reformer's "perspicuity of Scriptures" which is especially relevant to God's salvific communication? One explanation would be that a Biblical message of salvation can be clear in its meaning, but if the hearer's heart

is hardened (hostile to God), how is he or she to understand the full significance of it? Thus such a person can understand God's message with the intellect, but not "with the heart," which is necessary to effect salvation.

Another verse implies that God's Word can be either "open" or "closed," depending on the recipient's condition of enlightenment: "The entrance (פֶּתַח, 'opening') of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple (פְּתִי, ' silly (i.e. seducible), KJV: foolish, simple')" (Psalms 119:130).[68, 69] The connotation here is that God's Word is fundamentally in a "closed" state, awaiting for the advent of its "opening," at which time the simple may obtain understanding. "Simple" or "foolish" is quite likely the condition of the fallen humanity before being enlightened by God's light.

**The Visions of YHWH** – "I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things" (Daniel 7:15-16). Some revelations in the Bible are, initially, unknown to the recipients, until they are further informed, in this case by an angel. Later in the same book: "And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And He said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. … none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" (Daniel 12:8-10). This latter passage betokens that certain sacred things are to be hidden until the proper time, at God's sovereign disposal, and to be revealed only to the wise. This could be considered a type of "subjective" revelation to the wise. And the "objective" Word of God would not benefit the wicked. The message is also chronologically restricted and not to be published before due time.

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[68] James Strong, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), s.v. "6608. פֶּתַח."

[69] Strong, s.v. "6612. פְּתִי."

*In the New Testament*

**The Speeches and Acts of Jesus Christ** – "Ye search the Scriptures, for ye think that in them ye have life eternal, and they it is which bear witness concerning Me" (John 5:39, Darby). Many great rabbis incisively interpreted and annotated the *Law*, the *Psalms*, and the *Prophets*, and yet, from the Christian perspective, they misunderstood the most critical truth about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, which is critical to one's salvation. It is only in the New Covenant era, through new revelations of God, that His Son is clearly revealed, yet, according to Reformed theology, not to all, but only to the elect. The above saying of Jesus demonstrates that the contemporary Jewish teachers could not "connect the dots" between the Messiah and Jesus Christ. From the Christian viewpoint, the salvational undercurrent in the Hebrew Bible was well concealed to the temple officials and Pharisees of the time, and likely even to certain modern Jews. In similarly manner, the Jews failed to reach the same level of understanding as Jesus about the Sabbath, accusing Him of healing the sick on the Day of Rest (cf. John 7:23). When Jesus applied the same appellation, "I AM (ἐγὼ εἰμί)," to Himself (John 8:58), as YHWH did ("I AM THAT I AM" Exodus 3:14), implying equal status with the Father God, the only reaction on the part of the Jews is to try to stone Jesus to death. They were preoccupied with the notion of a Messiah that possesses the majesty and glory of an earthly conqueror to save them from the reign of the Romans, and thus tragically dismissed the real Messiah with "no form nor comeliness" right before their eyes.

"And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:10-11). Many Christians, preachers included, think that Jesus' parables are illustrations to make His points clearer to the audience.

However, Jesus Himself said otherwise: they are for the purpose of obscuring the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven from the wrong audience.

"Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matthew 7:6). Truths certainly need to be preached; yet, not to everyone equally and not without wrapping, due to the prevalence of "dogs" and "swine" who lie in wait for an opportunity to trample sacred things and ambush whoever possesses them.

"The same day came to Him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection … Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:23-29). Sadducees, as high priests and the wealthy sectors of the Jews, certainly had to be well-versed in the Scriptures.[70] Yet, Jesus told them that they did not "know" the Scriptures, not to mention God. Some theologians cite the Mosaic precept about teaching the Law to the Israelite progeny (Deuteronomy 6:7) as indication of the perspicuity of Scriptures.[71] They ask that if the Scriptures are not clear, how do you teach the children? For one thing, what Moses demanded was only about the Law, which has concrete, moral practical instructions to be followed. For another, memorization has its usefulness in education, regardless of comprehension. The theory goes that when enough material is stored in the mind, sooner or later the understanding will naturally follow. Similarly, the command to teach the children Scriptures would be the preparation for future enlightenment, because without the storage of fuel, when the spark comes, how does it kindle the fire? In any case, here, Jesus' rebuke to the Sadducees has proven that familiarization of the Scriptures, per se, does not necessarily produce the right kind

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[70] "The Sadducees were the party of high priests, aristocratic families, and merchants—the wealthier elements of the population. … During the long period of the two parties' struggle—which lasted until the Romans' destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE—the Sadducees dominated the Temple and its priesthood." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2021, s.v. "Sadducee," https://web.archive.org/web/20220810063420/britannica.com/topic/Sadducee.

[71] Brackett, “The Perspicuity of the Scriptures: Presupposition, Principle or Phantasm,” 43.

of knowledge. This does not mean, however, that it is useless to study the Bible. On the contrary, it is worth repeated stressing that Bible study is very essential for the Christian, because it paves the foundation for the subsequent enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Without the basis of familiarity with the Holy Writ, even God cannot, or probably would not, impart true Scriptural knowledge to a "blank slate."

"And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding (νοῦς, mind), that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45). This passage seems to say that the disciples of Jesus, before He was crucified, had about the same level of understanding of the Scriptures as that of other Jews. It was only after He had been resurrected and "opened their understanding/mind" that they began to possess a far superior knowledge of God's Word (at that time, only the Hebrew Bible). This Luke passage thus teaches that the mind of an ordinary person, whether a Christian or not, needs to be "opened" by God to truly know the Bible, which is a condition far surpassing a mere familiarity of it. As to when or whether the mind will be "opened," it is the prerogative of God. The Christian's duty is only to build up the scriptural familiarity as a foundation, for the future disposal of the Holy Spirit.

**The Advent of the Holy Spirit of Truth** – "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come" (John 16:12-13). The words of Jesus clearly indicate that before the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples cannot "bear" (βαστάζω, "to lift, lit. or fig. 'endure, declare, sustain, receive, etc.' – bear, carry, take up") many things that He would like to disclose

to them, but the Spirit of truth will be able to "guide" (ὁδηγέω, "to show the way [lit. or fig. 'teach']) them into "all truth."[72, 73] What a difference the presence of the Holy Spirit makes! To enlighten the mind of believers would be one of the main reasons for the subsequent descent of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost. Note that Jesus used the word *bear* instead of *understand*, "because they had not strength enough to carry, had not capacity to receive. There is a great principle involved in this saying, that revelation is measured by the moral and spiritual capacities of the men who receive it."[74] So, when it comes to truly understanding Biblical truths, it is not just the intellectual power of the mind, but also one's morality and spirituality, that matter. Therefore, the Scripture cannot be equally clear to people with ordinary, functional rationality. Those with a mind "opened" by the Holy Spirit certainly will gain more and deeper understanding, not in the way of esotericism, but in an authentic Biblical way of deep comprehension.

"Wherefore I also … cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding (καρδία, 'heart') being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling …" (Ephesians 1:15-18). Is it not peculiar that Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus to receive "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation," despite knowing that they already had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Furthermore, he seems to insinuate a special cognitive faculty called "eyes of the heart (τοὺς ὀφθάλμους τὴς καρδίας)" separate from the ordinary rational mind. Ellicott thinks the heart here

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[72] Strong, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*, s.v. "941. βαστάζω."

[73] Strong, s.v. "3594. ὁδηγέω."

[74] Alexander Maclaren, *The Holy of Holies: Sermons on the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Sixteenth Chapters of the Gospel of John* (London: Alexander & Shepheard, 1890), 294. Maclaren (1826–1910) was a Scottish Baptist minister and had served as the president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and president of the Baptist World Congress in London.

is equivalent to the Inner Person, and that it should be engaged, with the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, to fully understand God's message:

> The heart is similarly spoken of in relation to spiritual perception in Romans 1:21; 1Corinthians 2:9; 1Corinthians 4:5; it signifies the inner man in his entirety; and the phrase here used seems to convey the all-important truth, that for the knowledge of God all the faculties of understanding, conscience, and affection must be called into energy by the gift of the light of God.[75]

"But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. " (1 Corinthians 2:10-11) A literal interpretation of this verse tells us that a Christian has double spirits (or a double-sided spirit) inside: the Holy Spirit, and the human spirit, each with knowledge of their separate spheres, divine or natural, respectively. When the Holy Spirit is absent, or is "concealed" for one reason or another, the person can understand up to the human, ethical level, but not the divine, spiritual level, of the Scriptures.

**The Speeches and Acts of the Apostles** – "And Philip ran thither to him (the Ethiopian eunuch), and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. " (Acts 8:30-31) The eunuch, having "great authority under Candace, queen of Ethiopians," should have been a learned, or at least literate, man. But, even he admitted that he could not understand what the prophet Isaiah wrote without guidance. The passage he was reading was Isaiah 53:7-8, part of the so-called "fourth Servant Song of Isaiah (Isa. 52.13-

[75] Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 8, *Ephesians-Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 21. Ellicott (1819–1905) was an English theologian and had served as Dean of Exeter and Bishop of the united see of Gloucester and Bristol.

53.12)," and a very messianic passage related to the suffering Christ.[76] It is definitely at the core of the Christian salvation: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows … smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray … and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:4-6). If, as the Westminster Confession states, "… those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them," then here is a case that the learned but sincere and humble eunuch could not understand what he was reading and openly admitted that he needed guidance. Perhaps one could also argue that the eunuch's ignorance of the Scripture was because he lacked access to the New Testament Bible. But so did Jesus' *enlightened* disciples such as the evangelist Philip. May we, then, assume that the Bible is not equally open to all?

The same conclusion may be drawn from the admonition given by the author of the Book of Hebrews: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Hebrews 5:12). The audience, Christians to be sure, still required the teaching of "the first principles of the oracles of God" due to their slack. Are we to deny that the Scriptures were closed to them? If not, would they not have already known God's "first principles" and been able to eat "meat"?

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[76] Mark S. Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah's Servants: Paul's Theological Reading of Isaiah 40-66 in 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:10*, Library of New Testament Studies 330 (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 43. Gignilliat (1976–) is Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University in Alabama.

The apostle Paul also talked about the clarity of the Scripture: "All Scripture is given by inspiration (θεόπνευστος, "divinely breathed in") of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Scripture that he referred to is, of course, the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, Paul did not neglect to mention the other, spiritual or mystical, realm of the Scripture, of which he was the recipient of a special revelation: "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (… Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)" (Ephesians 3:2-4). Paul's profound spiritual understanding, translated into human language, became his epistles that occupy almost half of the books in the Greek New Testament. Within them, he spoke "of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16). If even the apostle Peter acknowledged that he himself has difficulty understanding certain parts of the Pauline epistles, who are we to say that they are completely "perspicuous"? Do we really understand them all? Can we claim to have the same degree and depth of understanding of Paul in regards to God's truths in the Bible? Can we also maintain, as Paul did, that we are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1)?

To summarize, this subsection first lists the opinions of various Reformed theologians about the clarity of the Bible. Most consider the salvation-critical part to be clear to all mankind, but also allow for difficult or "dark" places in it. Then, from the Scripture itself, and based on the "external clarity" proposition of Martin Luther, certain difficulties of the Bible are derived, which may or may not comport with the Reformed understanding. However, it is the opinion of the present writer that, what is stated in the Bible should be our best and final confirmation about its own perspicuity, or the lack of. If many spiritual truths are concealed behind ostensible,

written words, then, would not the task of locating and uncovering the Inner Person be even more urgent for the earnest Christian pilgrim?

## *Chapter Conclusion*

The subject of the Inner Person is one of the topics that are seldom mentioned in the Bible, and yet seemingly pervades the entire Scripture, concept-wise. As a central "entity" in a person, its salvific significance cannot be overemphasized. In this dissertation, we will utilize comparative study between the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Buddhism and the Christian teaching on the Inner Person to attempt to cast some light on this "mystery." This is accomplished by first defining the Inner Person in Christianity, and then setting up a model of illumination from the *Tathāgatagarbha* thoughts in Buddhism.

Throughout this dissertation, my presuppositions are: on the Buddhist side, taking only what is favorable for comparison – there are often conflicting messages in the primary sources, even within the same Buddhist *Sūtra*. In such cases, the "unfavorable" passages will not be considered, since we are not concentrating on the harmonization of Buddhist doctrines. Such selectiveness does not constitute a vicious cycle, however, because the Buddhist Scriptures are well-received and firmly established canons, at least in East Asian Buddhism, despite whatever incoherence therein. The passages quoted in this dissertation have withstood the test of time by their well-received canonical status, and have not been seriously challenged or refuted.

On the Christianity side, mainly the following three suppositions will govern: (1) the "inerrancy" of the Two Testaments as held by modern Evangelicals – based on the λόγος as God's "expired," or breathed-out, Word, (2) the Scriptures' "perspicuity" in the Reformed sense – that their superficial, literary meanings of salvation are intellectually discernible through human

endeavor, by comparing dictionary definitions or well-established commentaries, and (3) the existence of mysteries in the Bible that are beyond human rational comprehension, unless specifically and subjectively enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

With these understandings, and with a prayerful heart for enlightenment, I hope to proceed with this dissertation to cast light on the obscure topic of the Inner Person in the Bible, and to establish a foundation for future research on the practical aspects of this important Christian concept.

# CHAPTER 2. THE INNER PERSON OF CHRISTIANITY

We first explore the meaning of the Christian Biblical "Inner Person" through the Bible itself, using scholars' expositions on our main New Testament verses, and the tools of theological anthropology to get a better grasp of the overall concept about our subject, with the goal of building a working definition for the Inner Person.

## *Biblical Analysis*

Although there are only four instances of direct mention of the Inner Person in the Christian New Testament, the Bible should contain other indirect references to it, if the topic is of any meaningful significance, as we suppose, especially provided that the reader subscribes to the doctrine of divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16). Hence, it is this ancient source that we first turn to for our Inner Person exploration. To obtain a proper working definition, we need to find the meanings and the functions of the Inner Person as it exists in the Scripture, and as interpreted by exegetes.

### The Spiritual Meanings of the Inner Person

Various interpretations of the Biblical concept of the proposed deepest human composition can be classified in at least six major categories: the heart, personal being, hidden internal entity, true self, new creation, and master.

## *A Personal Being*

What is meant by "personhood"? This question has incited much debate throughout the centuries. Because of its complications and wide implications, its meaning has been separately defined legally, philosophically, and theologically, inter alia. Here we quote the latter two (philosophical and theological) aspects as more relevant to this project. For clarification, the adjective *personal* as used in this subsection does not carry the common English meaning "of or relating to a particular person; private," but it denotes the notion of personhood or entity, as in "relating to or having the nature of a person or self-conscious being: *belief in a personal God*."[1] Such conscious personhood necessarily also implies volition, as illustrated below, under the heading of "Romans 7:22."

In philosophy, the definition of a "person" is often of primary concern:

> One of the central problems of metaphysics is what it is to be a person. The answer ought to account for central phenomena of personhood; rationality, command of language, self-consciousness, control or agency, and moral worth or title to respect, are amongst the salient characteristics that have been thought to distinguish persons from other forms of life.[2]

The word can be traced to early Greco-Roman history, as Jaeger does:

> "Person" translates the Greek word πρόσωπον and the Latin *persona*. Πρόσωπον designates the side, the face, by which an object … or an individual presents itself. It can therefore be used about a presence "in person." This usage is also found in the Septuagint, which most often translates Hebrew פָּנִים ("face") by πρόσωπον … The word also means mask in theater, and hence the role played, as well as the actor who plays this role. It can therefore refer to the individual in their acts and words, as well as the person in their social capacity. … Later the legal meaning … was added: the human being is distinguished from things (*res*), he is a *persona*: humans have a special dignity and moral responsibility. … *Persona* also came to designate the human individual in their particularity. … it is

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[1] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (2016) , s.v. "personal," accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.thefreedictionary.com/personal.

[2] Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), s.v. "Person." Blackburn (1944–) was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, then Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina.

> as conscious and free subjects, because of their words and deeds, that humans are responsible before the law and possess a specific dignity.[3]

To connect the philosophical conception of personhood with the Biblical, Max Turner explains that "'face' (*prosopon*) is occasionally used as *synechdoche* for 'individual human'" but he thinks that the question whether the apostle Paul, or even the Church Fathers, consider humans (*anthropoi*) as *prosopa* is irrelevant, since the Latin term and its category were unavailable then. Nevertheless, the innovative adaptation of *persona* and *prosopon* "to the inter-trinitarian relations … opened the way to a new ontology of personhood. This was only rather later applied to *human* persons, and even then only received its focus on the subject-centred *interiority* of the 'person' in post-Cartesian developments."[4] Turner later adds that the discussion of personhood from a genuine Christian perspective invariably sets "primary, but not exclusive, focus to the question of how the life, death, and glorification of Jesus informs our view of personhood, divine and human. … the one God only becomes three *persona* ('Father', 'Son', and 'Spirit') as each relates, in intimate communion, with the other."[5] Alistair I. McFadyen clarifies this interrelationship further:

> The Father, Son and Spirit are neither simply modes of relations nor absolutely discreet and independent individuals, but Persons in relation and Persons only through relation. [Trinitarian] Persons exist only as they exist for others, not merely as they exist in and for themselves. … As the Persons are what they are only through their relations with the others, it must also be the case that their identities are formed through the others and the ways in which the others relate to them.[6]

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[3] Lydia Jaeger, "Christ and the Concept of Person," *Themelios: An International Journal for Students of Theological and Religious Studies* 45, no. 2 (2020): 279. Jaeger (1965–) is lecturer and academic dean at the Institut Biblique de Nogentsur-Marne in France.

[4] Max Turner, "Approaching 'Personhood' in the New Testament, with Special Reference to Ephesians," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (2005): 211. Emphasis original; same for all quotes from this article. Turner (1947–) is Professor Emeritus of New Testament at the London School of Theology.

[5] Turner, 215.

[6] Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 27. McFadyen is Senior Lecturer at the School of Philosophy, Religion and the History of Science at the University of Leeds.

This perception of personhood as both quintessence and relation made its debut in the Church's early formative disputation on the trinitarian theology in the fourth through fifth centuries. Relation-based personhood was particularly prominent in the Cappadocian Fathers, leading to "the development of a corresponding Christian anthropology which sees interpersonal relationship as the very essence – the *sine qua non* – of authentic personhood."[7]

In all indications, we can safely exclude inanimate objects, plants, and animals from personhood due to their lack of rational and inter-relating nature. On the contrary, God, angels, other spiritual beings, and humans all seem to qualify as persons. But, our main concern is: how are we to conclude that the Inner Person in the Christian New Testament is "a personal being"? Let us attempt to address this question from the four main New Testament passages themselves.

- 1 Peter 3:3-4 – This passage from the apostle Peter is about adornment – not the decoration of an object, but the ornamentation of the person (specifically, wives, but one can hardly object that it is applicable to all). Without defining the exact meaning of the Inner Person, let us first take note of the comparison here. The contrast is between the outward act (and by implication, the outward person) of adding on artificial articles of beauty, versus "the hidden person of the heart." Certainly, "the outward person" is a personal subsistence, being capable of emotions, wills, and consciousness. If so, we can argue that these characteristics could also be applicable to "the hidden person of the heart." The epithet ἄφθαρτος (undecaying), *prima facie*, might also indicate certain degree of "personhood."
- Romans 7:22 – This verse, by itself, does not show any comparison. But, when we expand our view to include the context (vv. 18-25), then, suddenly, we are confronted with an assortment of amazing contrasts: flesh (σάρξ, v. 18) vs. the inward person (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος,

[7] Turner, "Approaching 'Personhood' in the New Testament, with Special Reference to Ephesians," 215.

v. 22); to will (θέλω, v. 18, 19) vs. to perform (κατεργάζομαι, v.18); good (καλός, vv. 19, 21) vs. evil (κακός, vv. 19, 21); I (ἐγώ, v. 20) vs. sin (ἁμαρτία, v. 20); law in my members (νόμος ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν μου, v. 23) vs. law of my mind (νόμος τοῦ νοός μου , v. 23); mind (νοῦς, v. 25) vs. flesh (σάρξ, v. 25), etc. What is especially noteworthy is the contrast between the two "laws" in v. 23, which nicely elucidates the significance of the Inner Person in v. 22. Apparently, the "law in my members" refers to the law of the outward person, while the "law of my mind," to that of the Inner Person. Although all of the person's mind, affections, and will are involved, it is the latter that receives the most attention in this pericope ("to will is present with me," v. 18; "I would … I would not," vv. 19-20). These contrasts, or rather, conflicts, between the outward and the inward persons strongly suggest a fierce internal battle between two volitional entities, or two "personal" beings.

- 2 Corinthians 4:16 – This verse, similar to the passage in 1 Peter, consists of a direct comparison between the outward person and the Inner Person. The 1 Peter passage is a contrast in adornment without any ontological description, whereas here, the apostle Paul juxtaposes the two "persons" to show their dramatic difference in their divergent paths of progress – decaying vs. renewing. What is striking here is Paul's use of the term *person/ἄνθρωπος* instead of less specific choice of words, such as heart/καρδία, or spirit/πνεῦμα. Both of the latter terms are found abundantly in the New Testament: 160 times in 7 different forms for καρδία, of which 50 times appear in Pauline epistles, and 385 times in 11 forms for πνεῦμα, of which 128 are used by the apostle Paul.[8, 9] It naturally prompts our question as to why the apostle Paul does not use a customary word here, but chooses the term

[8] *Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV/Texus Receptus)*, s.v. "G2588 – Kardia", accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2588/mgnt/tr/0-1/.

[9] *Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV/Texus Receptus)*, s.v. "G4151 - Pneuma", accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4151/mgnt/tr/0-1/.

*outward/inward person* to express his unique theological insight.[10] Whether heart or spirit, if it pertains to humanity, it is not usually conceived of as expressing "personhood," since it is commonly recognized to be a faculty of a person. If a faculty, it would be akin to an organ of the whole person, and not a distinct entity within. Nevertheless, person/ἄνθρωπος carries the full potential and direct implication of "personhood."

With this verse in 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul presents to the reader two "personal entities," as two players under limelight in the stage of life. What evidence is there to show that they are "personal entities"? For one thing, there is the contrast between the outward and the inward persons, which are on two directly opposite paths – one towards decay, as we understand our natural person to necessarily undergo the aging process; but the other is continually being renewed? How do we come to terms with this latter part? Has there been any natural phenomenon in our known universe that possesses such growth pattern perpetually? Ultimately, the apostle Paul is telling us that the outward person must become null and void, but the Inner Person lives on forever! If so, can we say that this passage implies a conscious, "personal being"?

- Ephesians 3:16 – The context, vv. 14-19, constitutes a prayer, which echoes that in Ephesians chapter one. This prayer here pertains to the realization of revelation, which is manifested in inward power. The Greek text for the latter half of v. 16 with linear translation is shown below:

  … δυνάμει / κραταιωθῆναι / διὰ / τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ / εἰς / τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον
  … with might / to be strengthened / through / His Spirit, / in regard to / the inner man.[11]

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[10] Incidentally, the Chinese Union Version translates this verse as "… outward body … inward heart."

[11] Robert Young, *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*, TheWord ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1898), s.v. "Ephesians 3:16."

> It is quite conceivable that for some entity "to be strengthened with might," that entity most likely is a personal being. This postulation is also fortified by the fact that the word *power/δύναμις* occurs in the New Testament 120 times (45 times in Pauline epistles), with the overwhelming majority of usage relating to the capability of personal entity/-ies.[12]

The above analysis represent an attempt to attribute "personhood" to the Inner Person, purely from the scriptural perspective, and without asserting any claim of whether that personhood is the only entity or a separate entity of the human self. Undoubtedly, this scriptural analysis is only a very brief and simplified assay for the personhood of the Inner Person. A full treatment of this subject would require another treatise, which could be a sequel to this dissertation.

### *The Heart*

This interpretation is primarily based on the phrase ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος (the hidden person of the heart) in 1 Peter 3:4. Many commentators directly equate "the hidden person" with "the heart." For example, rejecting the claim of the heart being the seat of the hidden person, Dubis wrote that "it is more likely that the 'hidden person' is being equated with the 'heart' than being said to have its location there."[13] Similarly, Forbes analyzed the term

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[12] *Strong's Greek Lexicon (KJV/Texus Receptus)*, s.v. "G4151 - Pneuma", accessed July 1, 2021, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1411/mgnt/tr/0-1/

[13] Mark Dubis, *1 Peter: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2010), 88. Dubis (1960–) is Professor of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary of Richmond, VA.

*heart* this way: "Τῆς καρδίας is best taken as an epex. gen., i.e., the heart is the inner person and signifies the belief of the heart being the seat of one's emotions, disposition, and allegiance."[14, 15]

Other commentators simply note the characteristics of inner beautification of "the heart," "the self of the heart," or "the heart … where emphasis should be placed …."[16, 17, 18] Kelly is ambivalent about the exact meaning of this phrase, and criticizes the clumsiness of the Petrine construction by stating that the apostle "is plainly struggling to contrast interior character with outward appearance. By hidden person (lit. 'man') of the heart he means the unseen personality … the genitive being either possessive ('the inner person who dwells in the heart') or appositional ('the unseen person, i.e. the heart')."[19]

Achtemeier is also receptive, though not completely clear, to the idea of the Inner Person being "the heart": "As Kelly notes, it could also be a genitive of apposition, making 'inner person' and 'heart' equivalent, although this seems less likely here, as does his further suggestion of this being a possible genitive of possession, meaning 'the unseen person who dwells in the heart.'"[20]

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[14] "Epexegetical genitive, or genitive of definition: the substantive in the genitive case refers to the same thing as the head noun," "Summary of the Most Common Uses of the Genitive Case," accessed July 31, 2021, https://www.ntgreek.org/pdf/genitive_case.pdf.

[15] Greg W. Forbes, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: 1 Peter* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 100. Forbes is a lecturer in Biblical Studies at Melbourne School of Theology in Australia.

[16] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988). Clowney (1917–2005) was President and Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

[17] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 118. Davids (1947–) was Professor of Biblical Theology at St. Stephen's University, New Brunswick, Canada. He is Visiting Professor of Bible and Applied Theology at Houston Graduate School of Theology.

[18] Duane F. Watson and Terrance D. Callan, *First and Second Peter*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 74. Watson (1956–) is Professor of New Testament Studies at Malone University in Ohio. Callan (1947–) is Emeritus Professor of Biblical Studies at the Athenaeum of Ohio.

[19] John N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentaries 17 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1982), 129. Kelly (1909–1997) was a theologian at the University of Oxford and Principal of St Edmund Hall, Oxford.

[20] Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 213. Achtemeier (1927–2013) was Professor of Biblical Interpretation Emeritus at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

In contrast, Selwyn decidedly equates the hidden person with the heart: "St. Peter's whole thought here is ethical rather than metaphysical (as in 2 Cor. iv. 16) or psychological … τῆς καρδίας, genitive of definition: probably a Hebraism …."[21] On the other hand, Wallace implies that "the heart" is a metaphorical genitive of place.[22]

Vinson, Wilson, and Mills consider that ancient people "imagined that people thought and made decisions in their hearts, so [Peter] is directing the women in his audience toward their faculties of judgment and commitment."[23]

There are also commentators who take for granted that the meaning of the phrase should be self-explanatory, and thus do not care to expound the meaning of it by simply bypassing it, such as Feldmeier and MacArthur.[24, 25] Nevertheless, most interpreters side with either direct equivalence between the hidden person and the heart, or, less frequently, the latter being the seat or location of the former.

If the Inner Person is indeed equivalent to the heart, then we should also take into consideration what the word *heart* means throughout both Testaments. The Hebrew word most frequently used for *heart* is לֵב (*leb*), occurring 598 times. Another form of the same word with

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[21] Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays*, 2nd ed., Thornapple Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 184. Selwyn (1885–1959) was Warden of Radley College and also Dean of Winchester (Cathedral).

[22] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 124–25. Wallace (1952–) is Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

[23] Richard Bolling Vinson, Richard Francis Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 150. Vinson (1957–) is a visiting professor in the Department of Religion at Salem College in North Carolina. Wilson (1953–) is Professor of Religion, Emeritus, at Mercer University. Mills (1939–) is Professor of Christianity, Emeritus at Mercer University.

[24] "… the Christian woman should direct her efforts toward another form of attractiveness conforming to the 'hidden person of the heart' and its 'gentle and quiet spirit.'" Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2008), 181. Feldmeier (1952–) is Professor of New Testament at Georg-August University in Göttingen, Germany.

[25] "… Christian wives must be devoted to beautifying the hidden person of the heart. … They should manifest the inner beauty of spiritual virtue." John MacArthur Jr., *1 Peter*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2004), 180. MacArthur (1939–) is Chancellor Emeritus of The Master's University in Santa Clarita and The Master's Seminary.

also many appearances is לֵבָב (*lebab*), totaling 251 times. Strong gives a summary definition of the former as a noun in the following way:

> The heart includes not only the motives, feelings, affections, and desires, but also the will, the aims, the principles, and thoughts, and the intellect of man. In fact, it **embraces the whole inner man**, the head never being regarded as the seat of intelligence. While it is the source of all action and the center of all thought and feeling the heart is also described as **receptive to the influences** both from the outer world and **from God Himself**. *Leb* means heart; mind; midst. It is used of God (Gen 6:6; Jer 32:41) and man. …[26]

What is interesting here is that Strong considers the Inner Person to have already been implied in the Hebrew word, making the heart either the seat of the Inner Person or its equivalence. This is an astounding claim since the Hebrew Bible never mentions the phrase *inner person*. Furthermore, he also ascribes the function of human-divine communication, or secular-sacred interaction to the heart (being subject to influences from both realms), and by implication to the Inner Person as well. This is a fascinating aspect of the Inner Person that will be discussed further in subsequent discussions.

For the other form of the Hebraic term *heart* (לֵבָב, *lebab*), Strong is even more emphatic in drawing the equation of it with the Inner Person, or "inner being," as indicated in the following excerpts from a long list of possible interpretations:

> (5) *Lebab* can **be used of the inner man**, contrasted to the outer man, as (5a) in Deut 30:14: "But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (cf. Joel 2:13); (5b) "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sa 16:7). … (20) The "heart" **stands for the inner being** of man, the man himself. As such, it is the fountain of all he does (Prov 4:4). (20a) All his thoughts, desires, words, and actions flow from deep within him. Yet a man cannot understand his own "heart" (Jer 17:9). (20b) As a man goes on in his own way, his "heart" becomes harder and harder.

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[26] Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "3820. לֵבָב." Italics original; bold added for emphasis.

> But God will circumcise (cut away the uncleanness of) the "heart" of His people, so that they will love and obey Him with their whole being (Deut 30:6). …[27]

If so, the concept of the Inner Person has already existed in the Hebrew Bible, even if faintly and indirectly. Remarkable also is that Strong indicates that the heart/Inner Person is not understood by mankind, and is subject to degeneration until the arrival of God's "circumcision" to remove the defilements – a concept coincidental to the concealment of the *Tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for *heart* is καρδία, which appears 116 times. it is defined by Strong as:

> (1) the chief organ of physical life, and occupies *the most important place* in the human system. (2) By an easy transition the word came to stand for man's entire mental and moral activity, both the rational and the emotional elements. (3) It is used figuratively for the *hidden springs of the personal life*; (3a) the seat of total depravity, *the principle in the center of man's inward life* that defiles all he does … and (3b) it is *the sphere of Divine influence* … It represents the true character but conceals it. …[28]

Similar to the Hebraic version of *heart*, καρδία in the Christian New Testament also keenly implies the Inner Person, being "the most important place" in mankind, "the hidden springs of the personal life," and "the principle in the center of man's inward life." Although the last meaning is used negatively to refer to human depravity, it still represents the innermost core of the human being, and echoes the definition under the Hebrew word לֵבָב (*lebab*) that the hardened heart necessitates God's "circumcision" to become whole and pure. Lastly, in a similar fashion, both the Greek and Hebrew versions mention its susceptibility to "Divine influence," making the heart a vital faculty (or entity) in the functionality of communion with the Holy Spirit.

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[27] Strong, s.v. "3824. לֵבָב." Italics original; bold added for emphasis.

[28] Strong, s.v. "2588. καρδία." Italics added for emphasis.

Thus, we may conclude that the heart as presented in the Bible frequently could be deemed synonymous with the Inner Person, which constitutes a great mystery in both Testaments, yet is simultaneously related to humanity in the most intimate manner.

### *A Person Hidden Within*

This interpretation, as that of "the heart," mainly comes from the 1 Peter passage. As quoted earlier, Kelly mentions "unseen personality."[29] Among the most comprehensive definitions given is that of Achtemeier, in which he especially use the term *secret person*, although it still does not clearly and unequivocally reassure the reader of the actual meaning of this phrase:

> The "secret person" in this context refers not so much to the general inner aspect of the human being as it does to the person who is determined by a faith that is visible directly only to God. … The genitive τῆς καρδίας is probably qualifying, defining further what the "secret person" is: the seat of thought and thus of action. … The "secret person" is further defined by the phrase ἐν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ [in the incorruptible], probably best taken as a dative of accompaniment, rendered as "together with" or "accompanied by" … The following genitival phrase (τοῦ ἡσυχίου καὶ πραέως πνεύματος ["calm and quiet spirit"]) is appositional ("consisting of") and further defines what the author means by the "secret person,"[30]

Hiddenness of the Inner Person is not an innovation of the apostle Peter. Being a Jew, he most likely would have been well versed in the Hebrew Testament, or at least in Jewish culture of the time. It is precisely in the Hebrew Testament that the concept of YHWH's hiddenness abounds: "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself …" (Isaiah 45:15 KJV), "Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known" (Psalm 77:19). Even in God's redemption, His ways and means are mysterious: "When the LORD turned again the

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[29] Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 129.

[30] Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 213–14.

captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream" (Psalm 126:1). So, not only do God's people not know Him ontologically, neither do they understand Him soteriologically! Knowing this "self-hiding" attribute of God, Peter exhorts his readers to especially mind the "hidden person of the heart," always paying attention to its adornment "of a meek and quiet spirit" which would please God greatly, because "meekness" and "quietness" is in tune with God's self-hiding nature!

### *True Self*

Some commentators mix "true self" with "the heart," resulting in various combinations of the two phrases: "the self of the heart," "inner self, the hidden person, a person who has been transformed from the inside out by God's Spirit," "hidden inner self … true self, the self of the heart," "inward nature … true personality," "inner quality," and "inner self …."[31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36]

In Bultmann's anthropology of the New Testament, specifically of Paul, the apostle "does not know the Greek-Hellenistic conception of the immortality of the soul (released from the body), neither does he use *psyche* to designate the seat or the power of the mental life which animates man's matter … Rather, *psyche* in Paul means primarily the Old Testament נֶפֶשׁ (rendered *psyche* in the LXX) – 'vitality,' or 'life' itself."[37] In Bultmann's detailed analysis of the

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[31] Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 118.

[32] Scot McKnight, *1 Peter: The* NIV *Application Commentary*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 185. McKnight (1953–) is Professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Illinois.

[33] Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 118.

[34] Wayne A. Grudem, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Leon Morris, vol. 17, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007).

[35] Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Jobes (1952–) is a biblical scholar and Professor Emerita of New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Wheaton College in Illinois.

[36] Watson and Callan, *First and Second Peter*, 74.

[37] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 203–4. Bultmann (1884–1976) was a Lutheran theologian and Professor of New Testament at the University of Marburg in Germany. He was an influential scholar in modern biblical studies.

human body, *soma*/σῶμα, Paul does not subscribe to either the dichotomy (body, soul) or the trichotomy (body, soul, spirit) theory, but uses different terms to illustrate the different aspects of the whole person, or the self, as seen in the following discussion of Bultmann:

> What does Paul call man, and how does he regard him, when he is the subject of his own willing and doing, when he is his real self who can distinguish himself from his *soma*-self? In Rom. 7:22 and II Cor. 4:16 as a formal designation for that self he uses the term "the inner man" (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος), an expression that appears to be derived from the anthropology of Hellenistic dualism. But it has a purely formal meaning in Paul, as may be seen from the fact that it means two things of different content in the two passages cited. In Rom. 7:22, "the inner" is man's **real self** in contrast to the self that has come under the sway of sin: "the *soma* of death" (7:24) or "the *soma* of sin". In II Cor. 4:16 "the inner man" is still the **real self** … but in contrast to the physical body. Rom. 7:22 deals with unredeemed man under the Law, II Cor. 4:16 with the Christian, in whom God's power is at work (4:7) … The "inner man" of Rom. 7:22 is identical in content with the ***nous*** ("mind"), which belongs to man's essence … but "the inner man" of II Cor. 4:16 is the **self transformed by the Spirit** (3:18). Thus the term "inner man" as formal designation for the **subject-self** confirms our conception … of Paul's view of human existence as the having of a relationship to one's self.[38]

In addition to equating the Inner Person with one's true self, some theologians also bring into the equation the mind (νοῦς), citing Rom. 7:23-25: "This *nous* is the same thing as the *eso anthropos*, the inner man, or the *ego*, the **real self**, which can distinguish between good and bad. The **self** agrees with the law, that it is good; the **self** wishes to fulfill the law. … *nous* is here the religious knowledge and insight which honours and recognizes the law of God."[39]

Similarly, Dunn juxtaposes the Inner Person with "the 'I' as mind" in apposition while introducing a new phrase *the divided "I"* in his view of Pauline anthropology in Romans:

> … a feature of the second half of the passage (7.14-25) is the **divided "I"** and the divided law. … The "I" is divided: it is the "I" which wants to do good and to avoid doing evil; but it is the same "I" which fails to do the good and commits the evil (7.18-19). The culprit is sin: it enslaves the **fleshly "I"** and thus prevents the **willing "I"** from achieving what it wills (7.20). … **The willing "I," the inner**

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[38] Bultmann, 203. (bold added)

[39] Colin Brown, ed., "νοῦς," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 6th printing (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 3:127. (bold added) Brown (1932–) is Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in California.

> **person**, **the "I" as mind**, approves the law as the law of God (7.21-22). But the law used by sin (as indicated in vv. 7-13) battens on **the fleshly "I,"** the "constituent parts" of the "I."[40]

Another variation of the "self" interpretation comes from Ladd, who uses the terms *pneuma*, true inner self, and inner person interchangeably.[41] Furthermore, he considers the Pauline use of the phrase ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος to be consisted in two different ways: (1) the unregenerate person, found in Romans 7:22, in which case the Inner Person equals the mind; and (2) the regenerate Christian, used in 2 Corinthians 4:16, where it is contrasted with the outer person, "the human as a corruptible earthly being." "In both instances, 'the inner man' is the higher, essential self, either redeemed or redeemable, made for God and opposed to sin."[42]

While agreeing with Dunn in the analysis of the Hebrew concept of a whole person with different aspects, Ladd notes that the Jewish concept of humanity had undergone some transformations: during the intertestamental era, spirit and soul both take on distinct existences, and the former also becomes a component of human beings. As concerning psychology of the apostle Paul, four different viewpoints are presented: (1) following Hellenistic dualism, the flesh as the actual body is considered to be ruled by evil spirit, making it sinful; (2) ethical dualism – within the person is a higher, spiritual principle and a lower, fleshly principle, which war against each other constantly; (3) Bultmann's view that flesh as human natural existence is weak and impermanent; when mankind pursues not true life from God, but external pleasures for this

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[40] James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 473–74. (bold added) Dunn (1939–2020) was a New Testament scholar and Professor of Divinity in the Department of Theology at the University of Durham in England.

[41] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 508. Ladd (1911–1982) was Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in California,

[42] Ladd, 519.

earthly existence, sin ensues; (4) the position of W. D. Davies, derived from rabbinic doctrine, that two inclinations, good and evil, reside in mankind which fight for their own dominance.[43]

As shown above, many theologians are inclined toward equating the Inner Person with a person's true self, whether it is "the self of the heart," "inner self," "true personality," "real self," "*nous*/mind," "*pneuma*/spirit," or "the willing 'I,' the 'I' as mind." It is not surprising to find so many support for this interpretation, given the dire mental struggle that Paul describes in Romans 7:15-23 (specifically the two desperate cries of "it is no more I that do it" in vv. 17 & 20). These various appellations point to the fact that these scholars find in the Inner Person a character which is the deepest, most genuine and undistorted representation of our being. Perhaps they somewhat intimate the prelapsarian (before the fall) human nature of Adam and Eve, however remotely!

### *New Creation*

Since the apostle Paul describes the Inner Person as being "renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16), it is natural for commentators to associate it with what Paul writes in the next chapter (2 Corinthians 5:17): "new creation" (ESV, NIV, NKJV, NASV, ISV, etc.) or "new creature" (KJV, NASB, LITV, YLT, etc.), which he attributes as the new status to the Christian. Guthrie postulates that the Pauline Inner Person "is essentially man as [it] is renewed (2 Corinthians 4:16). Moreover, it is a continual process."[44] He envisions the Inner Person as completely dependent on the Holy Spirit, because it "has no resources other than the resources of

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[43] Ladd, 501–14.

[44] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 172. Guthrie (1916–1992) was a New Testament scholar and President of London Bible College (now London School of Theology).

the Spirit."[45] Further reinforcing his peculiar view of the renewal of the Inner Person, he goes so far as to withhold the human spirit, and therefore also the new creation/Inner Person, from the non-Christian, since "*pneuma* describes a specifically Christian state. It separates the Christian person from the non-Christian, because the latter is not in possession of it."[46]

An alternative approach to the role of the Inner Person in the spirit of the Christian comes from the "trichotomist," Nee. He opines that the divine-human communication occurs "directly in the spirit … in the 'inner man,'" which he subsequently concludes, from Paul's prayer in Eph. 3:16, as none other than "the new man in them after they have trusted in the Lord."[47, 48]

Ladd uses the phrase "quickened and energized by the Spirit of God" to describe a person's spiritual life found in the Inner Person.[49] If so, maybe we can say that only the new creation in the true Christian receives such empowerment of resurrection.

There are also scholars who do not specifically mention "new creation/creature," but imply it in their messages. For instance, Dunn notes:

> in [1 Co.] 2.14 the *psychikos* [soul-oriented, or natural (KJV)] person is by definition one who is unable to receive or appreciate the things of the *pneuma*. … Paul … also speaks of the human spirit, a still deeper depth or higher reality of the person. Moreover, he both implies and teaches that it is only by functioning at that level and by opening the human spirit to the divine Spirit that the human being can be whole.[50]

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[45] Guthrie, 560.

[46] Guthrie, 165–66.

[47] Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man*, Combined ed. (New York: Christian Fellowship, 1977), 36. Nee (1903–1972) was an influential Chinese Christian minister and writer. He died a martyr under the persecution of Communist China after twenty years of imprisonment.

[48] Nee, 242.

[49] Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 508.

[50] Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 78.

Such a contrast of *psychikos* (soulish) versus *pneumatos* (spiritual)prompts the question:[51] other than the new creation in the regenerate believers, what human spirit, within the New Testament scope, can open itself to the divine Spirit? In like manner, Bultmann states: "The term *nous* takes up the term 'inner man' … of [Rom.] v. 22; the *nous*, therefore, is man's real self in distinction from his *soma*, the self which has become objectivized in relation to himself. And this self (the *nous*) is an understanding self that hears God's will speaking through the Law, agrees with it, and adopts it as its own."[52] If the *nous* is not renewed by the Holy Spirit, how can it discern God's will? Thus Dunn and Bultmann both seem to implicitly take up the new creation as part of their understanding of the Inner Person.

### *Master*

Closely related to all of the above interpretations of the Inner Person is the reading of "master." If we say that the Inner Person is the heart, a personal hidden being within, the true self, and the new creation, it is quite natural that it somehow functions as a controlling principle in a person, like a "master," or as Vinson calls it, a "faculty of judgment and commitment."[53] But the most direct and straightforward reference to this appellation might have come from the New Testament itself: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master (**κύριος**) he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God (**θεός** or the Lord, **κύριος**) is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4).

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[51] The word *soulish* is used in this dissertation as the adjective of the noun *soul*, to denote "relating to, involving, or suggesting the soul," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “soulish,” accessed February 7, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/soulish.

[52] Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 212.

[53] Vinson, Wilson, and Mills, *1 & 2 Peter*, 150.

A survey of forty five major English versions of the New Testament indicates that the first κύριος is mostly translated as "master" in lower case, while the second κύριος (or θεός in some versions) is overwhelmingly capitalized, with only one exception: the *Lamsa Bible*, formally *The Holy Bible from Ancient Eastern Manuscripts Translated from the Peshitta, the Authorized Bible of the Church of the East* by George M. Lamsa (1957).[54, 55, 56] Lamsa belongs to a minority group which subscribes to the belief that the Syriac version of the Bible (the Peshitta, lit. "simple, common, straight") "is the faithful descendant of the original Aramaic text," which precedes and subsequently produces the Greek translations.[57] It is quite peculiar that he should translate both instances of the word *κύριος* as the lower-cased "master." Let us entertain the implications briefly.

For the first instance of κύριος – if, as most translators indicate by avoiding the capitalization, it does not refer to God or Christ or even the Holy Spirit, then what does the apostle Paul mean by it? Could he be hinting at the position or function of the Inner Person? If so, then the Inner Person is indeed a critically important presence inside each person. In essence, it is the dominating force to effect each individual's decision making. Taking in the context of the beginning part of Romans chapter 14, Paul is teaching that whether to consider certain foods clean, while other foods unclean, is to be decided by each individual's internal master, probably referring to the Inner Person. Other people should not interfere in this sacred determination process, because they lack the position and authority to do so. It is a matter of personal, internal

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[54] "Romans 14:4," Parallel, Bible Hub, accessed July 9, 2021, https://biblehub.com/parallel/romans/14-4.htm. Tabulation of lower case vs. capital case yields a ratio of 37:8.

[55] "Romans 14:4," Parallel, Bible Hub. Ratio of lower case vs. capital case (God/Master) is 1:44.

[56] William E. Paul, *English Language Bible Translators* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), 135, Adobe PDF eBook. Paul is the chief editor of Bible Editions & Versions: The Journal of the International Society of Bible Collectors.

[57] J. R. Ensey, *The Book We Call the Bible* (Willis, TX: Advance Ministries, 2010), Adobe PDF eBook. Ensey (1938–) was president of Texas Bible College and served administrative posts in United Pentecostal Church International.

guidance, and, if our assumption holds, is properly assigned to the Inner Person. In this case, other people should not attempt to play a part in it, and each person is responsible to sense what the Inner Person guides him/her to do. Pertinently, some Christians think that by seeking God's guidance in all things, however trivial, they become more "spiritual." However, experientially speaking, how many times in our lives does God actually and unmistakably voice His opinion to let us know what to do or decide? How many sane Christians can say that they do all things according to God's direct guidance? Therefore, we might venture to suppose that God assigns the task of most of our decision-making to a certain faculty or entity in us, which likely points to the Inner Person. In that case, as Paul admonishes, if not even God intervenes in one's discernment of cleanliness, who are we, as outsiders, to judge others?

Then what does Paul mean by saying, "to his own master he stands or falls (τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ στήκει ἢ πίπτει)"? Cranfield gives us an analysis based on the Greek dative case (roughly indirect object) of the first "lord" [κυρίῳ]:

> The first three words of this sentence are often understood to mean 'by his own Master's decision', and the last three to refer to God's judgment (whether present or eschatological). … But it is very doubtful whether the dative can bear the sense which [most] interpreters put on it. The explanation of it as an example of the dative of advantage and disadvantage is much more likely to be right. On this view the meaning of the sentence is that it is his own master whose interest is involved, who is concerned, in his standing or falling."[58]

Based on this interpretation, perhaps we may say that the Inner Person, as indwelling master, of each person gives guidance to ensure one's upright status, lest s/he falls, because the master is ultimately the one most affected by one's actions.

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[58] Charles E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, *Commentary on Romans IX-XVI and Essays, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testament* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1979), 703. Dative of advantage denotes the person or object for whose benefit the act is carried out. Cranfield (1915–2015) was Professor of Theology at the University of Durham in England.

Taking a step further, if we adopt the translation of Lamsa for the second instance of κύριος, as a lower-case "master," suggesting the "lordship" of the Inner Person in the personal cosmos, then it also could imply that the Inner Person has the power to justify one's decision, if s/he follows faithfully its guidance. May we then say that this ability of the Inner Person is faintly reminiscent of an almost divine soteriological prerogative, viz. moral justification? This "internal master" of ours would then be comparable to the conscience, which, when in proper working order, constantly checks on us to help us determine the right course of life. Certainly there are crossroads that present difficulties of choice, because many things are not so morally clear-cut. In most cases, decisions could possibly be made by our Inner Person following the best logical courses to take. In this regard, the apostle Paul simply requires us to be firm, not indecisive: "… Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Romans 14:5, cf. 1 Corinthians 7:37). And the apostle John likewise talks about the importance of a peaceful conscience: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21).

If the Inner Person is indeed placed in humanity by God to guide them, can this internal master in us make mistakes? Certainly there exists such probability. However, if God should think that we need corrections, His Holy Spirit surely will intervene, provided our Inner Person is sensitive enough to divine whispers. A good example may be mentioned that when Paul intended to preach in Asia Minor, he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6b), and then, when his missionary group intended to turn toward Bithynia, "but the Spirit suffered them not" (v. 7b). It was after following the Holy Spirit's repeated corrective warnings that the vision of Macedonia arrived as an affirmative direction. If the above assumption of the Inner Person holds true, then this episode of Paul shows us that: (1) under

ordinary circumstances, we should be unwavering to make our own decision according to the best judgment of the Inner Person; (2) if the Holy Spirit remains silent, then we have divine approval for our actions; (3) if the Holy Spirit intervenes, and we immediately obey, then we are in the right direction, and our previous decision was not a mistake on our part; and (4) therefore, it is of critical importance that our Inner Person becomes ever more sensitive to divine voices and movements.

Ultimately, God is undoubtedly our overarching Master at all times. However, in our everyday mundane life, He has assigned the Inner Person as our own personal, internal master in charge of our lives. Its function would then be for humanity to live a godly life on earth, in the process to grow toward the sacred destiny that God has designated for us. The spiritual goal for mankind, accordingly, would be the eventual union of our small master, "made a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5), with the Great Master of the Universe.

## The Holy Functions of the Inner Person

The word *holy* or *holiness* is usually understood in the modern English-speaking world to denote certain human moral conditions of ethical purity or freedom from sin.[59] However, the original Hebrew word קֹדֶשׁ (n.) or קָדוֹשׁ (adj.) carries the meaning of "separateness, or brightness, or freshness."[60] God is holy because He is separate from the created world. Humans or objects can also be holy, as "To the Hebrews the word originally indicated the state or condition of a

[59] Bridgeway Bible Dictionary, 2004, s.v. “Holiness” by Don Fleming, accessed July 10, 2021, https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/bbd/h/holiness.html?hilite=holiness.

[60] Encyclopedia of The Bible - Bible Gateway, s.v. “Holiness,” accessed July 11, 2021, https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Holiness.

person or thing as being separated from the common affairs of life and consecrated wholly to God."[61]

Since the Inner Person is the apostle Paul's invented term, we would like to link the word *holy* or *holiness* with his own words: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things …" (Rom. 11:36a, KJV). This connection is justified by the description of "separated or sanctified unto God" in the above dictionary and encyclopedia entries, because this verse implies a separation from secularity and profaneness, unto the divine realm. Although Paul does not use the word *holy* in association with the Inner Person in his epistles, it is arguable that the functions of the Inner Person can be portrayed in terms of being "of Him, through Him, and to Him," as outlined in the following.

### *The Holy Functions of the Inner Person in Romans 7:22*

The phrase κατὰ τὸν ἔσω ἀνθρώπον (according to the inward man – Darby), with the accusative case following the preposition, can be translated, "in answer to, in accordance with" the Inner Person.[62] In other words, "delighting in the law of God" is the will of the Inner Person. But the fallen human nature is quite pitiful, as Paul painfully but honestly says in his own case, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Romans 7:18). How is a person able "to will" godly thing, if, according to the theology of Reformed Protestantism, humanity is completely corrupt? The well-known "Five Points of Calvinism" even lists "total depravity [of humanity]" as

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[61] Bridgeway Bible Dictionary, 2004, s.v. "Holiness" by Don Fleming.

[62] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon: Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of* Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon (New York: American Book Co., 1882), s.v. "κατά." Liddell (1811–1898) was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and headmaster of Westminster School. Scott (1811–1887) was Dean Ireland's Professor of the Exegesis of Holy Scripture at Oxford University.

the first point.[63] But within this "total mess" called human nature, it would appear that God preserved a light of hope! Were it not so, there would have been no prospect for human salvation. Therefore, we may consider this "willing" to do good in the sight of God, which comes from the Inner Person, to be of divine origin. Only that which is "of Him" can be consecrated "to Him," and be deemed "holy."

Several attributes can be ascribed to the holy functions of the Inner Person. First is the innate nature. To Christians, it means a God-given nature. This was illustrated by the apostle Paul quite clearly from the beginning of the same epistle: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in [the ungodly (cf. v. 18)]; for God hath shewed it unto them" (Romans 1:19). In Paul's understanding, not only do believers know God, but even the ungodly (his term for non-believers) has a basic knowledge of God. It is an instinct, an innate capability to recognize the work or presence of God, though not necessarily salvifically. In his next chapter, Paul also confirms that the Gentiles, though not possessing the Mosaic Law, "do by nature the things contained in the law," and thus they "are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" (Romans 2:14-15). Therefore, we may say that the function of knowing God's law is inborn in all human beings, instilled by God at the dawn of human history.

Is it just the law of God that is the domain of the Inner Person? Elsewhere, the apostle Paul also teaches that "it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). "To will" and "to do" should cover most, if not all, of a person's conscious life. Paul may be saying that the Inner Person, as the divine-human communication

[63] Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen but Free* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 56. Geisler (1932–2019) was President and Distinguished Senior Professor of Theology and Apologetics, Southern Evangelical Seminary in North Carolina, and Distinguished Professor of Apologetics at Veritas International University in California.

channel, is a place where God exerts influence to affect our determination and behavior. In the Old Testament, there is also a relevant admonition: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). With the interpretation of the Inner Person as the heart, we can see that it governs the entire life of a human. Summarily from the above, it might be possible to assign a second attribute to the holy functions of the Inner Person: all-inclusiveness!

The third characteristic, constraint, should be obvious from Paul's extensively commented internal struggle in Rom. 7, summarized by an agonizing exclamation: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (v. 24). Judging from the close proximity of the mention of the Inner Person, v. 22, this lamentation would be the sorrowful consequence of the Inner Person delighting in God's law, yet finding no fulfillment of its holy inclination. If it does not have such a godly, almost unnatural predisposition, then regardless of the degree of fallenness in human nature, there would not have been any conflict, and the "total depravity" proposition of Calvinism would have become the guiding principle of the human society. And yet, there seems to be an unwavering, steadfast counteractive force which would not compromise with the corrupt proclivity of the "outward person," rendering an impassable schism between the inward and the outward personalities.

Is the Inner Person, then, so powerless to overcome the outward person? Denney not only disagrees, but also considers the Inner Person to be "that side of every man's nature which is akin to God, and is the point of attachment, so to speak, for the regenerating spirit."[64] This implies that he acknowledges the possibility for the Inner Person to possess certain divine powers or potentiality. In the Church Fathers, such tremendous powers can already be observed to be ascribed to the prelapsarian (before the fall) First Parents:

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[64] James Denney, "St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 2:643. Denney (1856 – 1917) was Professor of Systematic Theology, and later Principal at the Free Church College Glasgow, UK.

> In Paradise, then, man lived as he desired so long as he desired what God had commanded. He lived in the enjoyment of God, and was good by God's goodness; he lived without any want, and had it in his power so to live eternally. … There was in his body no corruption, nor seed of corruption, which could produce in him any unpleasant sensation. He feared no inward disease, no outward accident. Soundest health blessed his body, absolute tranquillity his soul. … No sadness of any kind was there, nor any foolish joy; true gladness ceaselessly flowed from the presence of God, who was loved "out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." … Body and spirit worked harmoniously together, and the commandment was kept without labor. No languor made their leisure wearisome; no sleepiness interrupted their desire to labor [Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Book XIV, Ch. 26].[65]

In the age of Reformation in the 17th century, many Protestants also embraced the Augustinian view that Adam's internal perfection is manifested outwardly as well – "a power of body, and of all his limbs" as Martin Luther describes. Thomas Milles further understands that God's image is reflected "in the understanding, will, and memory of the soul."[66] Bavinck sums up the Reformed position that "in our treatment of the doctrine of the image of God, then, we must highlight, in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed confession, the idea that a human being does not *bear* or *have* the image of God but that he or she *is* the image of God."[67] Furthermore, "this image extends to the whole person. Nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God. While all creatures display vestiges of God, only a human being is the image of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations."[68] From this, Hoekema concludes that the image of God cannot be a

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[65] Philip Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, trans. Marcus Dodsvol. 2, *St. Augustine's* City of God *and* Christian Doctrine (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1890), 453, Adobe PDF eBook. Schaff (1819–1893) was a Protestant theologian and served as a professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York.

[66] Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 12. Almond is Emeritus Professor of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Queensland in Australia.

[67] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 554. Italics original.

[68] Bavinck, 2:555.

trait that is "accidental" to humanity and therefore "is essential to his existence."[69] The overall consensus of the Christian West at the time was that the Genesis creation account put mankind at the supremacy of all creatures, and that it was God's decree that they should rule over all the earth. To achieve such an end, God created the perfect prototype of humanity, and endowed them with "perfect knowledge," not gained from their "superior sensory powers," but "immediate and innate," or "inbred by God." Some, like Alexander Ross, even expand Adam's knowledge to include the supernatural realm.[70] All these wonderful attributes of the original creation of Adam become lost due to his fall, except possibly the extant goodness in the Inner Person, as Paul disclosed in Romans.

### *The Holy Functions of the Inner Person in 2 Corinthians 4:16*

The apostle Paul's depiction of the Inner Person in 2 Corinthian is quite different from that in Romans 7. In the latter, great debates have raged about whether this chapter describes the apostle Paul's experience prior to, or shortly after, his extraordinary visionary conversion on his way to Damascus (cf. Acts 9). Judging from his strong conviction after this personal revelation by the risen Savior, and from the audience he addresses (those who know the law) in the very beginning of the chapter, and especially from the fact that he has just spoken about the believers' baptism into the death of Jesus Christ in the previous chapter, the entire discourse in Romans 7 most likely is his parenthetical digression for readers under the law, who struggle to be perfect legalistically but are all the more confronted by the opposing forces inside. That used to be Paul's

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[69] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994), 66. Hoekema (1913–1988) was Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Michigan.

[70] Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, 33–47.

condition, because he was "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Philippians 3:6).

On the other hand, when he wrote 2 Corinthians in around 55 CE, more than two decades after his conversion, he was not only a mature Christian, but also a veteran minister and a battle-tested soldier of God.[71] His spiritual attainment at this time must have greatly surpassed his condition right after the Damascus encounter. It was at this time that the apostle disclosed to the Corinthians many aspects of his life to encourage them to follow his footsteps. It is not for naught that this particular epistle is nicked-named the autobiography of the apostle Paul, since it "contains more autobiographical material than any of his other writings," rendering it the best book of the Bible to get a glimpse into the life of the apostle.[72] Especially, the pericope of 4:7-18 represents a most profound discourse on suffering under persecution. Within this passage, the most pivotal concept about spiritual growth amidst suffering under persecution would be that of the Inner Person.

The reader's attention is first drawn to the metaphor of the "treasure in earthen vessels." Paul does not explain this metaphor further, thus both nouns are open to various interpretations. A common exegesis for the "earthen vessels" is the fragile, decaying bodies, generally of all persons or of Christians, or specifically of the apostle or his missionary group.[73, 74] Whether the

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[71] Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020, s.v. “Letters of Paul to the Corinthians,” accessed July 15, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Letter-of-Paul-to-the-Corinthians.

[72] Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, “2 Corinthians,” in *Zondervan* NIV *Study Bible: New International Version*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker, fully rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1802. Hughes (1915–1990) was a Calvinist New Testament scholar, Vice Principal of Tyndale Hall, and a visiting Professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

[73] "2 Corinthians 4:7," Commentaries, Bible Hub, accessed July 16, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_corinthians/47.htm. Commentaries with the "individual" view include: *Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers*, Benson's Commentary*, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary,* and *Bengel's Gnomen.*

[74] "2 Corinthians 4:7," Commentaries, Bible Hub, Commentaries with the "mission group" view include: *Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testament, Matthew Poole's Commentary on the Holy Bible, John Gill's*

"earthen vessels" pertain to the apostolic mission, the Christians, or all humanity in general, most commentators agree that the phrase refers to frail human bodies. As for the "treasure," many commentaries (e.g., Horton, Hughes, Shillington, etc.) logically trace back to the previous verse (2 Corinthians 4:6) and conclude that it should most likely point to that "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."[75, 76, 77] But why use such a long series of genitive phrases to describe the "light"? Is it not, on the risk of oversimplification, the indwelling Christ, whom God is pleased to reveal in Paul? (Galatians 1:16). After all, God is light! (1 John 1:5).

Having somewhat arrived at the general meaning of "the treasure in earthen vessels," we may then postulate, with the church father, Ambrosiaster, that "Just as a treasure is put in a hidden place, the sacrament of God is hidden within a person, in his heart."[78] And as discussed earlier, the heart is almost synonymous with the Inner Person. So, in this view, Paul is teaching his readers that, although it is the entire person that is under persecution, the sustaining power comes from the Treasure, the Light, within the Inner Person. Immediately, he demonstrates what he means by pointing out that the Treasure under persecution produces "the excellency of the power … of God" (v. 7b) which not only assures the apostle's survival under extreme affliction, but can even be a nutrient for the Church's life and growth (vv. 8-12). Since his discourse centers around the topic of "life" and "death," in that the "death" around the mission of Paul yields "life"

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*Exposition of the Entire Bible, New Geneva Study Bible, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges,* and *The Pulpit Commentary.*

[75] Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 109. Horton (1916–2014) was a Renewal theologian in the Pentecostal movement and served as Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Bible and Theology at the Evangel University in Missouri.

[76] R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 89. Hughes (1942–) has taught Greek and homiletics at Talbot School of Theology as an adjunct professor, and also served as Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania.

[77] V. George Shillington, *2 Corinthians*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 98. Shillington (1937–) is Emeritus Professor at the Canadian Mennonite University.

[78] Ambrosiaster and Gerald Lewis Bray, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 221. Bray (1948–) is Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School.

for the Church (v. 11), it naturally leads to the conclusion that "the excellency of power" is a power of resurrection (v. 14).

Paul also talks about this power of resurrection within the believer in his Epistle to the Ephesians, that God grants "… the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe … which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead …" (Ephesians 1:19-20). In the Old Covenant era, YHWH often directly imparts His power upon the prophets and kings to perform wonders. But now, in the New Covenant era, although the immediate impartation of divine power is not excluded, the norm of divine infusion of power is often indirect, through the indwelling of Christ, which is hinted by the theological expression of "the treasure in earthen vessels." Where does the resurrected Christ actually dwell in the Christian? This dissertation attempts to argue that it is the Inner Person that is the seat of His indwelling. Thus, in this new dispensation, God's power works through the indwelling Christ, under the proper function of the Inner Person, and is finally ostensibly manifested, or invisibly experienced, by the outward person.

Overall, the holy functions here mean the resilient, sustaining power that the Inner Person is able to convey to the Christian under persecution. The decaying of the outward person, thus, is not a shame, but rather a sign of glory, and the renewing of the Inner Person can be likened to a present reward for the suffering.

### *The Holy Functions of the Inner Person in Ephesians 3:16*

In this Ephesian chapter, this verse belongs to a section which is the apostle's prayer for the Ephesians (vv. 16-19). In Greek, these verses continue the "long and complicated sentence"

beginning from v. 14.[79] The passage also relates power ("to be strengthened with might"), but a different kind than that in 2 Corinthians 4:7. Here it is in reference to the building of the church, whereas in 2 Corinthians the power is for dealing with suffering under enemy's attack. The holy functions of the Inner Person in Ephesians 3 can be deciphered from the context of the entire prayer.

"**That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith**" (v. 17a) – The indwelling of Christ is not achieved by diligent pursuit, but by a simple faith. Since Paul is not preaching to nonbelievers here, he should be addressing the reader's Christian faith as a deeper conviction than just the initial trust in Jesus Christ as a Savior at conversion. Indeed, deeper faith involves "also its continuing character. To trust Christ to save is to set the stage for trusting him in that subsequent walk of life. In that entire experience, they will come to know God intimately." Hence, Paul prays for the growth of the Ephesian church in Christian life, "that Christ will increasingly manifest his reign over every area of their lives and push back the footholds that evil has maintained."[80] Faith is not by sight, nor by sensations; however, Christ's indwelling can sometimes be visibly manifested in the Christian life, and that could be construed as a powerful effect of the Inner Person, cooperating seamlessly with the indwelling Christ. It is not unlike what Paul writes to the Galatians, "… I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). The word *formation* evinces a gradual process – which can be conceived as a process of Christ forming His abode completely and perfectly in the Inner Person.

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[79] Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 368. Barth (1915–1994) was a Reformed theologian and served as Professor of New Testament at Dubuque Theological Seminary, University of Chicago Divinity School, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and at the University of Basel.

[80] Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 84, ProQuest Ebook Central. Arnold (1958–) is a New Testament scholar and serves as the dean at Talbot School of Theology of Biola University in California,

"**That ye, being rooted and grounded in love**" (v. 17b) – Commenting on the grammatic disjointedness of the two perfect passive participles, ἐρριζωμένοι (having been rooted) and τεθεμελιωμένοι (having been founded) with the syntax, M. Barth suggests that this phrase is best considered "a third request or a side remark," and its meaning closely approximate that of "a key theme of the entire letter of 1 John … that our love and response come out of an *already established love* God has for us."[81] One of the best known verses which illustrate this theme of love in 1 John could be found in 4:16: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to (ἔν, "in") us. …" So, we have this readily available love from God, not out of our reach in the heavens, but already planted in us. But, where in us is it planted? From the context, that location appears to be in our Inner Person, where Christ inhabits. It is a love that cannot be destroyed by any outward forces, and a love that can be "rooted and grounded" for spiritual growth.

"**May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height**" (v. 18) – these four aspects (of love, as the context suggests) have become subject to various allegorical interpretations. Already in ancient Christianity, Ambrosiaster uses the sphere to illustrate that its length, breadth, height and depth are the same, and thus "all is proportional within the immeasurable infinity of God."[82] With other Church Fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome of Stridon, rampant speculations for analogies run amok, e.g., the shape of the cross, or the attributes of Christ. Nevertheless, these terms "are introduced with no other purpose than the simple and consistent one of setting forth the surpassing magnitude of Christ's love for us. The power to comprehend that love in its utmost conceivable grandeur and its furthest-reaching relations is what Paul prays God to grant his

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[81] Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3*, 128. Emphasis added.

[82] Mark J. Edwards, ed., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 155. Edwards is Professor of Early Christian Studies at the University of Oxford.

Ephesians."[83] Further, this utmost splendor is of such stupendous magnitude that it necessitates a joint effort of all saints to comprehend. How does the natural person "jointly comprehend" something with others? It can never be accomplished except through the uniting capability of the indwelling Christ, presumably in each individual's Inner Person!

"**And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge**" (v. 19a) – Many commentators have noticed the seemingly "paradoxical" statement here, that Paul prays for the Ephesians to know something that is unknowable. But most agree that Paul means the knowledge of the love of Christ is something the Christian can never exhaust, not in this lifetime, and not even in the hereafter. However, it should not stop the Christian from seeking an ever deepening extent of knowledge. Some commentators consider the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ to be an empirical type of understanding which must be personally experienced.[84] While admitting that the knowledge here is not purely rational "but of conscious, personal experience," Salmond provides his explanation on the paradoxical tension between "to know" (γνῶναι, aorist active infinitive) and the "knowledge" (γνώσεως, genitive), that the essence lies

> not in any antithesis between theoretical or discursive knowledge (Ell.) and practical knowledge, or between false knowledge and true (Holz), or between human knowledge and divine (Chrys.), but in the simple fact that there is a real knowledge of Christ's love possible to us, *a knowledge that is capable of increase as we are the more strengthened by power in the inner man*, while a complete or exhaustive knowledge must ever remain beyond our capacity.[85]

This knowledge that is beyond our capacity to fully comprehend actually echoes that of the beginning prayer in chapter one: "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of

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[83] S. D. F. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 3:315. Salmond (1838–1905) was Principal of the United Presbyterian Church College in Aberdeen, Scotland.

[84] "Ephesians 3:19," Commentaries, Bible Hub, accessed July 21, 2021, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/3-19.htm. Among those with this opinion are *Matthew Poole's Commentary, Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, Meyer's NT Commentary, Pulpit Commentary,* and *Vincent's Word Studies.*

[85] Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," 3:316. Emphasis mine.

Him" (Ephesians 1:17b) where the word "knowledge" takes a different form in Greek: ἐπιγνώσει (dative singular). It is an emphatic form of γνῶσις, indicating "'exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition,' and is a strengthened form of *gnosis* [γνῶσις], expressing a fuller or a full 'knowledge,' a greater participation by the 'knower' in the object 'known,' thus more powerfully influencing him."[86] Thus, the love that surpasses knowledge is a love of perfect knowledge, which is not noetically apprehended, but is known through revelation and wisdom – provided by the indwelling Christ through the Inner Person, as the context would suggest.

"**That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God**" (v. 19b) – Speaking of fullness (πλήρωμα), already Paul in the beginning of this epistle (Ephesians 1:22-23) established that the universal Church is not only the body of Christ, but "the fullness of Him (Christ) that filleth all in all." Here again, Paul prays for the Ephesian church to be filled with "all the fullness," but this time "of God," a repetition with slight variation to emphasize the point, and indirectly to equate the two (Christ and God). That the Church is filled with the fullness of Christ is, according to Paul, a fact, as indicated by his use of the present, indicative verb "to be" (ἐστὶν), conveying the "present" time of action.[87] However, not all members of this Body of Christ are in such condition, which fact prompted the apostle to pray for their being filled with the divine πλήρωμα (fullness).

The apostle John also talks about Christ's fullness (John 1:16), but skips the teaching on receiving it. Unlike John, Paul's prayer tells us the path, at least the very first step, which is for the Inner Person to be strengthened. It seems that God's πλήρωμα (fullness) must be so very powerful, that a weak vessel has no capacity to contain it. This notion opposes our natural

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[86] W. E. Vine and F. F. Bruce, *W. E. Vine's New Testament Word Pictures: Romans to Revelation, Every Verse Explained* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 554. Vine (1873–1949) was a Biblical scholar and theologian; he served as the Vice Principal of Mount Radford School in UK. Bruce (1910–1990) was a biblical scholar and Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester in UK.

[87] John D. Harvey, *Greek Is Good Grief: Laying the Foundation for Exegesis and Exposition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 83. Harvey is Dean and Professor of New Testament at Columbia International University Seminary & School of Ministry in Columbia, South Carolina.

concept that our feeble vessel needs God's fullness in order to become strong! But the Bible is full of teachings contrary to our normal, logical conception; e.g., in Jesus' saying, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matthew 13:12). Elsewhere, Paul also relates, "in all might being made mighty according to the power of His glory" (Colossians 1:11, YLT), which again bespeaks the teaching that in order to be made powerful, the person needs to be "in all might" first.[88]Therefore, we might suppose that one major holy function of the Inner Person in Ephesians 3 is to gain that initial strength so as to create in the originally feeble vessel the capacity to receive the great fullness of God.

### *The Holy Functions of the Inner Person in 1 Peter 3:4*

Within this verse, the phrase *of a meek and quiet spirit* is a genitive phrase in Greek (τοῦ ἡσυχίου καὶ πραέως πνεύματος), with the two adjectives "meek and quite" sharing one article to modify the noun, *spirit*. Peter does not seem to indicate that the "spirit" is the Holy Spirit, but "the phrase … is appositional ('consisting of') and further defines what the author means by the 'secret person.'"[89] In such a view, the spirit/Inner Person has two attributes: meek (πραΰς or πράος) and quiet (ἡσύχιος). The apostle Peter, when writing this epistle, might have recalled his Master's self-description, that He is "meek (πράος) and lowly (ταπεινός) in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

In the same vein, Matthew, the gospel writer, records Jesus as healing the sick, but commanding them not to broadcast His name, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: "He shall

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[88] Robert Young, *Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*, TheWord ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1898), s.v. "Colossians 1:11." This translation follows the Greek in word order, unlike KJV.

[89] Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 214.

not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets" (Matthew 12:19). Is this not similar to the "quiet spirit" that Peter has in mind? Peter realizes that the meek kind of heart and spirit is a particularly suitable decor for the Inner Person, because it conforms to the human (as opposed to the divine) nature of the indwelling Christ. Relating to this concept of adornment, the apostle John, writing his awesome vision in the *Apocalypse*, sees the Church so decorated as "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a Bride adorned for her Husband" (Revelation 21:2).

Although Peter is writing to the female members of the church, can we not also apply his admonition to all Christians? With such true inner beauty as the meek and quiet disposition of the Inner Person, its holy function is manifested as unifying the Church in preparation for her Husband's advent for that ultimate union at the end of world history.

## Section Summary

From exegesis of Biblical passages, we have arrived at certain probable properties of the Inner Person: a deeply hidden personal being, the heart, true self, Christ's new creation, and the master of our being. Associated with these roles of the Inner Person are some sacred functions, such as: taking delight in God's law, governing the human will, reflecting God's image, serving as the holding place of the treasure of power and light under persecution, being the seat of the indwelling Christ, receiving the love and fullness of Christ, and cultivating a "meek and quiet spirit" as adornment of the Bride of Christ. All of these characteristics, along with their proper sacred functions that lead a person God-ward betoken the critical and essential position of the Inner Person in us. These characteristics and functionalities from the exegesis of the four major Biblical passages also serve to define what the Inner Person is, as delineated in the Bible.

## *Theological Anthropology*

Since the modern era, anthropology occupies an increasingly critical position in the study of religion. "Concentration on anthropology in dealing with the problems of fundamental theology reflects the modern development of the philosophical idea of God," observes Pannenberg. He further describes the reason of modern philosophy's turning away from atheism and agnosticism towards "conceiving God as a presupposition of human subjectivity."[90] Philosophers abandon the universe as the ground "to demonstrate in a quasi-experimental way that God is the first cause of the natural order. Instead, they argued from the existence and experience of human beings in order to show that God is inevitably presupposed in every act of human existence."[91] As such, anthropology and theology constitute the two most important spheres in modern religious studies, and have often been joined together as one. Feuerbach is well known for making a direct link between the two: "… the secret of theology is nothing else than anthropology—the knowledge of God nothing else than a knowledge of man!"[92] This conflation should not be surprising, considering that the foundation of Christianity is set on the incarnation of the Son of God, which event converges on Him the immanence of humanity and the transcendence of divinity. In attempting to answer the question of the psalmist, "what is man?" (Psalms 8:4), theological anthropology should undoubtedly provide us great insights into the Christian conception of the human interior.[93]

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[90] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 11.

[91] Pannenberg, 12.

[92] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, first natural lib. ed. (Walnut, CA: MSAC Philosophy, 2008), 164. Feuerbach (1804–1872) was an anthropologist and philosopher. He studied under Hagel but later became a left-wing Hegelian and was influential on the formation of Marxism.

[93] Matthew C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man: Theology as Anthropology from Irenaeus to Athanasius* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 2–4. Steenberg is Professor of Theology and Head of Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds Trinity University in UK.

To enlighten our understanding of human self-consciousness, especially relating to the Inner Person, we will first briefly turn to the tripartite-oriented New Testament anthropology as the overarching guideline for our understanding of Biblical human composition in the New Covenant era, and then present three trichotomist theologians, representing a sampling of three Christian eras (Patristic, Reformation, and Modern). As opposed to dichotomy, which asserts that the human composition consists of the body and the soul as the material and immaterial aspects, trichotomy adds an additional interior dimension, called the spirit. The reason for this choice of trichotomous study is not only that it will greatly aid in our development of the understanding of Inner Person, but also that it is supported by the Scripture in many places. Although dichotomists could argue similarly, this debate is far from settled, since neither side is a Biblical precept carved in stone. The trichotomist stance of this dissertation should be a safe assumption since historical and Biblical supports are plenty. A philosophical reason can also be given, in that humans are indisputably God's most treasured creation, different from all other animals, as evidenced by His breathing into Adam's nostrils to give him life. If animals possess both body and soul (because they have emotions, will, and certain intelligence), it seems natural that human beings should have another internal dimension which allows them to sense and communicate with God, which all other earthly creatures lack.

Our first trichotomist theologian is a Greek Church Father, Irenaeus, from the second to third centuries; the second and third theologians are more modern, Martin Luther in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, and J. B. Heard in the nineteenth century. The line of development of this doctrine is succinctly summed up by Berkhof this way:

> The tri-partite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy … The most familiar but also the crudest form of trichotomy is that which takes the body for the material part of man's nature, the soul as the principle of animal life, and the spirit as the God-related rational and immortal element in man. The trichotomic

> conception of man found considerable favor with the Greek or Alexandrian Church Fathers of the early Christian centuries. It is found, though not always in exactly the same form, in Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. But after Apollinaris employed it in a manner impinging on the perfect humanity of Jesus, it was gradually discredited. … During the nineteenth century trichotomy was revived in some form or other by certain German and English theologians, as Roos, Olshausen, Beck, Delitzsch, Auberlen, Oehler, White, and Heard … as to the nature of the *psuche* … Delitzsch conceives of it as an efflux of the *pneuma*, while Beck, Oehler, and Heard, regard it as the point of union between the body and the spirit.[94]

## A Trichotomist View of New Testament Anthropology

Both Testaments never specifically teach about the precise constituents of a human being; they only sporadically hint at this issue. It, therefore, becomes the task of Biblical, and especially New Testament, anthropology to digest, assimilate, and analyze the vast scriptural data in an attempt to arrive at a plausible answer. Because this derivation is so indirect, it is not surprising that there exist various views, all claiming the support of both modern science and Biblical truths. This ambiguity is vividly portrayed by the German Lutheran theologian, Franz Delitzsch:

> It is of no avail to say that either Dichotomy or Trichotomy exclusively is the scriptural representation of the constitution of human nature. There are such various kinds of views of dichotomy and trichotomy, that, in general, neither conformity with, nor opposition to, Scripture can be predicated of either. Scripture speaks at one time in a definitely dichotomic strain, as *e.g.* Matt. vi. 25, Jas. ii. 26, 1 Cor. vi. 20 (according to the reading of the *textus rec.*); at another in a strain as absolutely and undeniably trichotomic, as 1 Thess. v. 23, Heb. iv. 12. For there is a false trichotomy, and in opposition thereto a scriptural dichotomy; and there is a false dichotomy, and in opposition to it a scriptural trichotomy.[95]

Here, to debate the various strains of anthropological hypotheses is beyond our scope of discourse. Nevertheless, among the major schools – monism, dichotomy, and trichotomy – the

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[94] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 191–92.

[95] Franz Delitzsch, *Clark's Foreign Theological Library*, trans. Ernest Wallis, 2nd English ed., vol. 13, *A System of Biblical Psychology, 4th series* (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1879), 103. Delitzsch (1813–1890) was a Lutheran theologian and Hebraist and held professorships at the University of Rostock, then the University of Erlangen, and finally the University of Leipzig, all in Germany,

last seems to make more sense in our context, since the bifurcation of "body" and "spirit," often used by the apostle Paul, could be considered a common usage or abbreviated notion, setting the material part of a person against the immaterial. Or, it could be that "the soul belongs altogether to the lower nature, so that when St. Paul uses the two-fold division, 'body and spirit,' the soul is reckoned … as part of the body; and when St. Paul describes the 'works of the flesh,' he includes among them such distinctly soul-sins as 'heresies' (Galatians 5:20)."[96] As Delitzsch points out, the scriptural verse most frequently cited as support for the trichotomist view is 2 Thessalonians 5:23, only because it is the one verse which includes all three "parts" of a person – spirit, soul, and body – in the entire Bible. Another passage that is on a par with this verse in weight and significance would be Hebrews 4:12, which states that the word of God can serve as a two-edged sword to divide asunder the soul and the spirit, thus somewhat convincingly refuting the dichotomist identity of these two entities. Since neither dichotomy nor trichotomy receives a universal consensus, we are at liberty to select either for our analysis with many solid Biblical and scholarly support, and without damaging the integrity of our study. By setting our focus on trichotomy, it most readily anticipates the consequences of what the Inner Person insinuates.

When we turn to the commentaries on the 2 Thessalonians verse, many theologians give us their tripartite perspectives. One of the most detailed analysis comes from A. J. Mason:

> This is St. Paul's fullest and most scientific psychology, not merely a rhetorical piling up of words without any particular meaning being assigned to them. Elsewhere, he merely divides man according to popular language, into two parts, visible and invisible, "body and spirit" (1Corinthians 6:20; 1Corinthians 7:34, et al.); the division into "body and soul" he never uses. … The "spirit" (*pneuma*) is the part by which we apprehend realities intuitively – i.e., without reasoning upon them; with it we touch, see, serve, worship God … it is the very inmost consciousness of the man (see, e.g., 1Corinthians 2:11); it is the part of him which survives death (Hebrews 12:23; 1Peter 3:19 …). The "soul." (*psyche*) includes the

[96] Arthur James Mason, *A New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, ed. Charles John Ellicott (London: Cassell, 1884), 3:146. Mason (1851–1928) was Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cambridge, and Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge.

> intellect, the affections, and the will: and it is of the very essence of the gospel to force sharply upon men the distinction between it and the spirit (Hebrews 4:12). Low-living men may have soul … in abundance, but their spirit falls into complete abeyance (Jude 1:19).[97]

Similarly, Daniel Whitby applauded the apostle for validating "the ancient and true philosophy, that man is … τριμερης υποστασις, 'a compound of three differing parts.'" He cites the Platonists as supporting the conviction that the human soul is "irrational," and under the sway of "the affections of the body"; but the rational mind wages war against the illogical soul, using the body as an "instrument." The stoics, likewise, assert that "the three constituent parts of man are σωμα, ψυχη, νους, 'the body, soul, and mind.'"[98] Whitby's analysis of the 2 Thessalonians verse follows:

> … seeing the spirit and the body are unquestionably the constituent parts of a man, it is reasonable to conceive, that the ψυχή mentioned here must be so also, especially since it is divided from the spirit and the body by the particle καί. Moreover, by following the motions of this brutish appetite, is a man styled ψυχικός, 'the animal man,' and by being animated and informed by this ψυχή, is the body called σῶμα ψυχικόν, 'an animal body,' 1 Cor. xv. 44, 45; and by conveying of this ψυχή or inferior soul, to his posterity, is the first Adam said to be made εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν [into a living soul], to convey this animal life to his posterity.[99]

As for their functioning, Andrew R. Fausset comments that when these three parts of humanity are at their respective originally proper positions, they "constitute man 'entire,'" with the spirit connecting the person "with the higher intelligences of heaven." And therefore, the human spirit is the "highest part of man which is receptive of the quickening Holy Spirit (1Co 15:47)." But, "in the unspiritual, the spirit is so sunk under the lower animal *soul* (which it ought

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[97] Mason, 3:146.

[98] Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman, *A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament and the Apocrypha*, vol. 4, *A Commentary on the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament and The Revelation of St. John* (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1845), 805–6. Whitby (1638–1726) was a theologian and biblical commentator and an Arminian priest in the Church of England. His theological position was strongly anti-Calvinistic.

[99] Whitby and Lowman, 4:806.

to keep under) that such are termed 'animal' (*English Version*. *sensual*, having merely the *body* of organized matter, and the *soul* the immaterial animating essence), having *not the [Holy] Spirit*."[100]

If we search the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance for the term ψυχικός (*psuchikos*), it is defined as: "from G5590 [ψυχή, soul]; *sensitive*, i.e. *animate* (in distinction on the one hand from G4152 [πνευματικός, spiritual], which is the higher or *renovated* nature; and on the other from G5446 [φυσικός, physical], which is the lower or *bestial* nature): - natural, sensual."[101] Obviously, Strong holds a trichotomist view, since he conceives the human as being constituted by the physical body, the soul, and the spirit, in ascending order. As for Biblical support, the latter two parts are concurrent in the same verse in 1 Corinthians 2:14 ("But the natural man (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος, better translated, 'soulish person') receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually (πνευματικῶς) discerned.") This verse robustly indicates that the apostle Paul views the intangible makeup of the human being in two separate parts – soul and spirit, which, when combined with the material flesh, place Paul in the trichotomist camp. It is interesting that the KJV, ESV, NASB, ASV, YLT, Darby, and a whole array of English translations render ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος as "natural man/person," indicating the disquietude of the translators to juxtapose "soul" with "spirit." The Chinese Union Version has "屬血氣的人," literally "a person belonging to flesh-and-blood," which is a close approximation of "a natural person." What constitutes the

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[100] Robert Jamieson, Andrew Robert Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary: Critical, Practical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2, *Galatians-Revelation* (Toledo, OH: Jerome B. Names, 1884), 167. Italics original. Jamieson (1802–1880) was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Fausset (1821–1910) was an Anglican biblical commentator who served as rector of the parish of St Cuthbert's Church in UK. Brown (1803–1897) was a Professor of Theology at the Free Church College of the University of Aberdeen.

[101] James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, updated ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), s.v. "G5591 ψυχικός." Italics original. Strong (1822–1894) was an American biblical scholar and lexicographer, best known for authoring the Concordance.

most deviant to the original Greek would be NIV: "the person without the Spirit," a clear interpolation by the translators. One of the few correct renditions among major New Testament versions is the Literal Emphasis Translation: "the soulish man." In any case, at least in the 1 Corinthian verse, the apostle Paul vividly shows us the existence of two separate faculties, the soul and the spirit, with unequivocal ranking of the former as inferior and the latter as superior.

By far, the boldest proclamation of trichotomy comes from the American Christian pastor/author, Tozer, whose idea of the "private sanctum" inside each person, which holds "the mysterious essence of his being," is surprisingly akin to the Pauline Inner Person:

> This far-in reality is that in the man which is what it is of itself without reference to any other part of the man's complex nature. It is the man's "I Am," a gift from the I AM who created him. … the "I Am" which is man is derived from God and dependent every moment upon His creative fiat for its continued existence. … privileged beyond all others. … The deep-in human entity of which we speak is called in the Scriptures *the spirit of man*. … As God's self-knowledge lies in the eternal Spirit, so man's self-knowledge is by his own spirit, and his knowledge of God is by the direct impression of the Spirit of God upon the spirit of man. … It reveals the essential spirituality of mankind. It denies that man is a creature having a spirit and declares that he is a spirit having a body. That which makes him a human being is not his body but his spirit, in which the image of God originally lay. … At the far-in hidden center of man's being is a bush fitted to be the dwelling place of the Triune God. There God planned to rest and glow with moral and spiritual fire. Man by his sin forfeited this indescribably wonderful privilege and must now dwell there alone. For so intimately private is the place that no creature can intrude; no one can enter but Christ; and He will enter only by the invitation of faith.[102]

Although Tozer does not mention the role of the soul, its existence is implied, in that his description of the spirit goes much further and loftier than the normal, sensible functions of the immaterial soul, such as intellect, mind, will, and emotions. His naming of this inner reality as "I Am," which so closely mimics the appellation of its creator, the great, self-existent I AM, corresponds to what Jesus describes in John 10:34-35, that those "unto whom the word of God

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[102] Aiden Wilson Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place of God*, ed. Anita M. Bailey (Camp Hill, PA: Christian, 1966), 9–10. Emphasis original.

came" is called "gods," quoting Psalm 82. As one of the main justification for the "deification" doctrine of the Orthodox, this attribution also well behooves the status of the Inner Person.

This survey of the historical trichotomist view of human composition, with further enlightenment from the Buddhist Tathāgatagarbha doctrine, should greatly help us to understand the Inner Person in the New Testament. The following subsections describe the thoughts of three Christian theologians who are known as trichotomists, followed by a brief critical analysis.

## Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130 – c. 200)

This Greek Church Father was fairly obscure until the 20th century, when theologians begin to heed, probably as a consequence of the aforementioned connection between theology and anthropology, "his 'nascent trinitarianism', or development of what is essentially an 'economic trinity,'" along with his apologetic defense against Valentinus' Gnosticism, resulting in an "extensive anthropological discussion." He is even deemed by some historians to be the "first theologian" of the Church, and "the first voice of the patristic age" to elucidate "image-anthropology" – the study of humanity from the perspective of the *imago Dei* [image of God], after which God created the human race, according to Genesis 1:27.[103]

Irenaeus' anthropological discourse, described as "Christological," is founded on two basic premises:

(1) YHWH is personally and immediately involved in creating Adam through His "two hands," which are His Son and the Holy Spirit, refuting any idea of intermediate agents. Irenaeus obtains this conclusion not from the creation narrative in Genesis, but from the first few verses of

[103] Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 16–17.

the Gospel of John. Steenberg summarizes this point as "the culmination (Christ) effects the beginning (Adam) – a retrospective and recapitulative theology."[104]

(2) Closely related to the first supposition is the second, that Adam and Eve are created with the specific intent that they partake in "a larger *taxis* or economy," that, having possessed the image of the Son in their nature, they might advance through the divinely ordained "*oikonomia* [economy] of development and growth," toward the final goal of becoming God's perfect handiwork.[105]

The image-anthropology of Irenaeus interprets the Genesis creation account to yield a tripartite understanding of the human substance: spirit, soul, and body. The body is the dust as formed by God's two Hands, and the soul is the "means of reception of the Spirit of the Father." The body "is inspired, vivified, increased and held together" and even possessed and ruled by the soul, in such a way that "the body should be compared to an instrument, while the soul possesses the reason of an artist." As opposed to the mortality of the body, the incorporeal soul is immortal. However, Irenaeus insists that the soul per se "is not life, but partakes in the life bestowed on her by God. … by participation in life the soul became alive. Thus the soul and the life which it possesses must be understood as separate existences." This life the soul must receive from the Holy Spirit. The "breath of life" received by Adam is but a "token", which can be fully realized in humanity only by the divine-human union through Christ's incarnation.[106] In this regard, Behr further explains the Irenaean concept of anthropology that "the Spirit is essential to Irenaeus' understanding of man, yet is not a 'part' of his constitution … The Spirit itself is not a man, nor

[104] Steenberg, 22–28.
[105] Steenberg, 41–42.
[106] Steenberg, 38–40.

even a part of a man, but is itself given to man in such a manner that it can be legitimately described as his Spirit."[107]

Thus, the anthropology of Irenaeus cannot be ascribed "full trichotomy," but can be summed up as a compositional dichotomy, yet actualized trichotomy: "The human person is two 'parts' in composition (body and soul), yet three in actualization (body, soul and Spirit)."[108] As concerning the Inner Person, if we consider it the spirit, then for Irenaeus it is not an innate part of mankind, but an "appended entity" granted by the Holy Spirit through the salvation of God. However, this theory likely means that only Christian believers enjoy such divine grace.

## Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)

This reformer breaks away from the traditional dichotomist understanding of the Roman Catholic church to assert the supremacy of the spirit over the soul. "The spirit is the highest, noblest part of man, wherewith he is fitted to apprehend intangible invisible, eternal things; and it is briefly the house within which the faith and word of God dwells."[109]

When it comes to the soul, Luther's definition is somewhat murky, but not unlike that of Irenaeus: "the soul is just the same spirit conformed to nature, but still in another agency; namely, in that in which it vitalizes the body and operates through it, and is often taken in Scripture for the life." He attributes human reason to the soul, and describes the condition of an unenlightened soul as missing the "higher light" of the spirit, resulting in the "light of reason" to dominate the person. Such a person is inevitably prone to error, because the soul is too weak to perform its

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[107] John Behr, *Asceticism and Anthropology in Irenaeus and Clement*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 99–100. Behr (1966–) is an Eastern Orthodox priest and theologian, and the Regius Professor of Humanity at the University of Aberdeen. He was the dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary,

[108] Steenberg, *Of God and Man*, 40.

[109] Delitzsch, *Clark's Foreign Theological Library*, 13:460.

functions in accordance with divine precepts. As for the body, its agency is only to execute and utilize the understanding of the soul and the belief of the spirit.[110]

Luther cleverly makes an analogy from the Old Testament – using the tabernacle of Moses with its three separate quarters. The first, *sanctum sanctorum* (the Holy of Holies), is the locus of the presence of YHWH, where utter darkness engulfs the entire space continuum. The second compartment is *sanctum* (the Holy, or Sanctuary), in which the only light source is a lampstand with seven candles. On the outside is the third section, called *atrium* (outer court), uncovered for the sun to shine in. Luther compares the Christian's spirit to *sanctum sanctorum*, "God's dwelling-place in dim faith without light. For he believes what he does not see, nor feel, nor apprehend." The soul as the middle component would be *sanctum*, where the seven candles represent "all kinds of understanding, discrimination, knowledge, and perception of bodily visible things." And the body, of course, is *atrium*, where visible actions can be observed.[111] With this analogy of the tabernacle, Luther undeniably exhibits his trichotomist proclivity.

In summary, the Inner Person or the spirit in Luther's theology is analogous to Strong's definition of the Hebraic word for *heart*, לֵב (*leb*) or לֵבָב (*lebab*), in that it resides in the deepest part of mankind, as the Holy of Holies in the Mosaic tabernacle, and it also perceives divine influences or revelations.

## John Bickford Heard (1828 – ?)

In the nineteenth century revival of the trichotomy doctrine, one of the staunchest spokesperson would be John B. Heard, who unequivocally lays bear not only the historical

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[110] Delitzsch, 13:461.

[111] Delitzsch, 13:461–62.

reason for its under-appreciation by most theologians, but also his own analysis of the Scripture, painting a vivid portrait of the theory that is convincing, yet without exaggeration. Heard was a relatively obscure theologian, and not much about him can be gleaned from existing public data. However, his influence can be seen by the mention of him in works of systematic theology such as that of Berkhof and of Strong.[112, 113] The reason for choosing Heard as an example is because he specifically wrote a book on trichotomy, entitled *The Tripartite Nature of Man: Spirit, Soul, and Body*, instead of limiting the discussion to a small portion within a theological treatise or volume.

### *Historical Obscurity*

From the onset, Heard states the foundation of the doctrine to be the distinction between *psyche* and *pneuma*. He observes that the Greek Church Fathers have caught a glimpse of it, but never fully developed it into a full-fledged orthodox doctrine. The Latin Church never considers it to any substantial extent, owing in part to the comparatively lack of precision in the Latin words *spiritus* and *anima* as opposed to *pneuma* and *psyche*, respectively. Furthermore, the rejection of trichotomy as "mystical" by prominent theologians such as Tertullian of Carthage, followed by Augustine of Hippo, sets the tone of the Western Church on this subject for roughly the next one and a half millennia. In the East, however, "Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Didymus of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Basil of Caesarea, all note the distinction of soul and spirit, and designate the spirit as that which bears the truest image of

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[112] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 192, 210.

[113] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students*, 2nd ed. (New York: A C Armstrong and Son, 1889), 245. Strong (1836–1921) was a Baptist minister, theologian and President and Professor of Biblical Theology at the Rochester Theological Seminary.

God" (cf. on Irenaeus above). Regrettably, the discussion of the topic tapers off soon, likely due to the Greek Fathers' scruple of being erroneously associated with Apollinaris' heresy, which rejects the human *pneuma* of Jesus Christ, depriving Him of a perfect human nature.[114]

To make matters worse, says Heard, theology often unconsciously embraces maxims and principles from contemporary philosophical schools that are predominant. The dichotomy of body and soul widespread in modernity could be imputed to this indiscriminate adoption of secular ethos, since it "rests on the old Protagorean system of couples of logical antitheses and opposites." Consequently, Christian theologians are "still held by the categories of matter and mind, and supposed man to be made up of two parts, the reasonable soul and human flesh." Even if they should make any kind of distinction between *pneuma* and *psyche*, they generally subsume the former under the latter as a "sub-division."[115]

### *Function Implies Existence*

Referring to the incident of Nicodemus' evening visit to Jesus, during which he was told by the Teacher from God that a person needs to be reborn to see the kingdom of God, Heard asks, what part of a person is been born again, especially "from above," and "of the Spirit"? Evangelical theologians uphold the rebirth of a believer as a necessary result and indication of her salvation, but some of them explain the phrase *being born again* as a change in a person's temperament, such as "a new *direction* to the affections, desires, and tastes, or a new will or power to turn to God." In so defining it, they relegate the spiritual second birth to "rather a renovation of the old, than the birth of something new." Heard is not opposed to a renewal of the

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[114] John Bickford Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man: Spirit, Soul, and Body: Applied to Illustrate and Explain the Doctrines of Original Sin, the New Birth, the Disembodied State, and the Spiritual Body*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), 4–11.

[115] Heard, 7–8.

person at conversion; what he rejects is the outright equating of such renewal with rebirth. He criticizes theologians for stopping at the mere understanding of "the *function* of spiritual-mindedness," without pursuing further to its original source, "the organ which discharges that function."[116] In other words, Heard understands that the new function implies the existence of a new or restored faculty.

This special organ that is responsible for the function of our spirituality is only to be discerned when the Christian attains spiritual maturity. Otherwise, "we see only half the glory of God's word if we suppose that the same organ can discharge two different functions, serve, i.e., as the intellectual instrument of the unawakened psyche, and also as the instrument of religious consciousness when the spirit is awakened and turned to God." And so, a person's conversion in belief "is only fully understood in all its bearings when we see that it is the wakening up of what was previously dormant, the divine part in man now turned to its proper [divine] use …" This results in the hierarchy of the spirit dominating the soul, and the soul the body.[117]

### *Human Creation Account Revisited*

In Heard's view, although the Genesis narrative of Adam's making is not proof of trichotomy, it nevertheless insinuates his tri-partite composition. Heard is of the opinion that decay governs the organic universe, even prior to the fall of Adam and Eve. Different from other corporeal creatures, however, Adam is given the potential ability to transcend this dissolution should he abide by God's commands. This potentiality takes the form of God's breath. Since the divine breath descending into Adam must be of the same essence as God Himself, and since humanity is created in God's image and after God's likeness, there must be "a higher nature

[116] Heard, 17–19.
[117] Heard, 20–21.

communicated … conveyed in a different way," conferring upon mankind the capacity to participate in God's very own nature.[118]

Heard insists on translating the plurality of the Hebrew phrase חַיִּים נִשְׁמַת faithfully as "breath of lives," which, amazingly, is very rarely so rendered in the popular Bible versions.[119] Only a handful of commentaries mention the plural form of the Hebrew word, and even fewer bother to make a brief comment on it.[120] But Heard's interpretation is that the plurality of "lives" might indicate the multiplicity of the spirit's life, that it is never isolated to itself, but constantly requires the divine presence. "[God] is ever present to the spirit … He sees us from within … Thus the life of our spirit is a double life in a sense which would abundantly justify the plural form."[121]

Having been formed from the dust of the ground into "an animal life" and received the breath of lives in the spirit, Adam then goes through the third stage of his formation, becoming a living soul. This part of him is referred to as "*tertium quid* [third thing, or intermediate component] of body and spirit."[122] Taking notice of the same word נֶפֶשׁ *(nephesh*, "soul" generally*)* being used in the prior chapter to denote various living creatures, Heard is convinced that the soul is a common constituent of both humankind and beasts:

> The general expression, Nephesh Chayah, a living soul, which is applied to the animal creation as well as to man, well expresses the nature of man's soul at present, midway between matter and spirit – a little lower than the angels, a little higher than the brute. … So far from the expression Nephesh Chayah indicating

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[118] Heard, 40–43.

[119] "Genesis 2:7," Parallel, Bible Hub, accessed July 29, 2021, https://biblehub.com/parallel/genesis/2-7.htm. In this online Bible resource, only one (Smith's Literal Translation) out of thirty nine versions has the plural translation.

[120] "Genesis 2:7," Parallel, Bible Hub. From the eleven commentaries surveyed, only four (Benson's Commentary*, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible,* Matthew Poole's *Commentary on the Holy Bible,* and *John Gill's Exposition on the Entire Bible*) give very short notice.

[121] Heard, *The Tripartite Nature of Man: Spirit, Soul, and Body: Applied to Illustrate and Explain the Doctrines of Original Sin, the New Birth, the Disembodied State, and the Spiritual Body*, 44–45.

[122] Heard, 46.

> any difference between man and the brutes, it would rather, taken by itself, suggest a community of nature. Of the lower creation spoken of … in chap. i., it is said that they became living souls, and the Hebrew Nephesh, instead of suggesting any idea of immateriality, much less immortality, is the general expression used for all animal life.[123]

*Summary of the Human Condition*

Thus, the human composition consists of the body as "sense-consciousness," the soul as "self-consciousness," and the spirit as "God-consciousness." The Scripture divides the good and evil propensity of mankind as spiritual and fleshly, respectively. The soul, being the intermediary between the spiritual part and the corporeal part was originally made a neutral faculty in Adam and Eve, and given the freedom to choose either way. Their eventual downfall from grace was not singularly a disobedient act, but also a change in the nature of the soul toward a disposition of the flesh, thereby not only losing its neutrality and the holy inclination toward the spirit, but also incurring spiritual death of the *imago Dei*. Even so, Good Providence ensured that "the germ of the *pneuma*" is still preserved in the entire race descending from the fallen First Couple. It can be sensed by us in the form of "conscience," which is responsible for "bearing witness [of God] … accusing or else excusing" (Romans 2:15).[124]

To sum up Heard's view, he takes the "rebirth" teaching of Jesus in the Gospel of John and infers that the fallen person's spirit is normally "dormant" until being reborn by the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion into Christian faith. The reader may recall that in chapter two, Strong's Hebrew dictionary for the word *heart* describes its unregenerate state as growing "harder and harder" until "God … circumcise[s] (cut away the uncleanness of) the 'heart'," which echoes what Heard claims here. This also corresponds to the apostle Paul's teaching that the

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[123] Heard, 46–47.

[124] Heard, 351–52.

Inner Person of the true believer gets "renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). Heard also makes a literal exegesis of the "breath of lives" that God exhales into Adam, meaning that the human spirit is not a single life all by itself, but that God is "ever present to the spirit." Therefore, the hierarchy of anthropology consists in: the spirit or Inner Person as "God-consciousness," the soul as "self-consciousness," and the body as "sense-consciousness," from the highest to the lowest.

## Section Summary and Some Critique of the Three Theologians

Irenaeus' image-anthropology does not seem very consistent and definite. He hypothesizes the immortality of the soul, and yet insists that the soul in itself is not life, except through participation with the Divine. The soul and the life are treated "as separate existences." But the soul, נֶפֶשׁ/*nephesh* in Hebrew and ψυχή/*psyche* in Greek, is consistently referred to, and translated into English, as "life." Apparently, both the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament do not treat the soul and life as distinct existences. Although Irenaeus' Christocentrism is undoubtedly orthodox Christianity, his assignment of "the breath of life" received by Adam from God to a mere "token," which must be actualized through the union with the Word Incarnate, results in the awkward position of his quasi-tripartite stance – the ambiguity of the human structure as "two parts in composition" and "three in actualization." Even more severely faulty in his theory is that his contention also blatantly denies the spiritual part of the non-believer, as if only true Christians possess an active spirit, and no one else does. Irenaeus' influence in this regard is quite substantial, and can be observed in modern New Testament theology, such as that of D. Guthrie and of G. E. Ladd (cf. section 2.1.1.5 "New Creation").

More well-defined than the trichotomy of Irenaeus is that of Martin Luther, since he only describes the unenlightened soul as missing the superior light of the spirit without completely depriving this faculty or entity from the whole person. But his analogy of the tri-partite nature of humanity using Moses' tabernacle in the wilderness is weak, to say the least. He compares the soul to the Sanctuary, in which stands the gold lampstand with seven lamps, whose light represents human discernment and understanding. However, within the Sanctuary is not only the lampstand, but also the table, the showbread, and the altar with its incense (Exodus 26-30), all of which are not mentioned by Luther to relate to the soul. Yet, an even more serious flaw of this analogy is revealed when we read in the Gospels that, at the moment Jesus "yielded up the ghost," the veil separating the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies "was rent in twain from the top to the bottom …" (Matthew 27:51, also Mark 15:38, Luke 23:45). Thus, in our present New Covenant era, the Sanctuary and the Most Holy have merged into one. The question, then, is: does Luther intend to ascribe trichotomy to the Old Covenant era, and dichotomy to the new? There is thus an apparently insurmountable difficulty with his trichotomist anthropology, or at least in his analogy.

In contrast to Irenaeus and Luther, J. B. Heard states his trichotomy unequivocally, using persuasive Biblical evidences to support his arguments. He rightly understands the word *soul (nephesh/psyche)* to be the equivalent of "life" in Biblical usage in both Testaments, and thus should not be an exclusive terminology for humans, but should indicate any form of corporeal life in the cosmos. This theory naturally and ultimately leads to the deduction of a higher part in mankind, since they are the most superior creature on earth, and that higher part is none other than the spirit, because that is what distinguishes them from other animals, when God breathed

into Adam the breath of lives (חַיִּים נִשְׁמַת). This distinct separation of the soul and the spirit is quite convincingly attested both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

Among contemporary theologians who support such trichotomist view is Boice, who shows from various Biblical passages that the human spirit is one of three ways that render mankind's "uniqueness and superiority to the rest of creation."[125] He explains: "Humanity exists for communion with God who is Spirit (Jn. 4:24). This communion is intended to be eternal as God is eternal. Here we might say that although we have physical bodies, as do plants, and souls, as do animals, only human beings possess spirits. It is on the level of the spirit alone that we are aware of Cod and commune with him."[126] What contributes to the dichotomy/trichotomy confusion is partly due to the language of the Bible itself:

> … in the earlier parts of the Old Testament, soul (*nephesh*) and spirit (*ruach*) are used interchangeably, which has introduced confusion. Still, as time went on, *ruach* increasingly came to designate that element by which men and women relate to God, in distinction from *nephesh* which then meant merely the life-principle. In conformity to that distinction, "soul" is often used in reference to animals, but "spirit" is not. … In the New Testament the linguistic data are similar. Thus, while soul (*psyche*) and spirit (*pneuma*) are sometimes freely exchanged for one another as in the Old Testament, *pneuma* nevertheless also expresses that particular capacity for relating to God which is the redeemed person's glory, as opposed to *psyche* which even the unsaved and unresponsive possess (1 Cor. 2:9-16).[127]

Boice rightly notes that the dichotomists "nevertheless recognize that there is some thing about man that sets him off from animals. That is all that the distinction between spirit and soul

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[125] James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology*, Revised ed., The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 150. Boice (1938–2000) was a Reformed Christian theologian, served as Chairman of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, and founded the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.

[126] Boice, 151.

[127] Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology*, 151–52.

in the three-part system means. Spirit, soul and body are simply good terms to use to talk about what it really means to be a human being."[128]

Another modern theologian, Archer, quotes Paul's well-known tripartite verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and asserts that "quite clearly the spirit and the soul are differentiated here as distinct elements of the human psyche, and man is represented as triune in nature. This is exactly what we should expect, if man was really created in the image of the Triune God (Gen. 1:26-27)." Together with the distinction between the *pneumatikos* (spiritual person) and the *psychikos* (natural person) in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15, as well as the similar differentiation (spiritual and natural bodies) in 1 Corinthians 15:44-46, he concludes that "quite clearly then, the spirit is distinct from the soul, or else these verses add up to tautological nonsense. We therefore conclude that man is not dichotomic … but trichotomic."[129]

Heard's underscoring of the "breath of lives" in the plural form of the genitive hints at the possibility of multiplicity within the spiritual portion of the human construct, which corresponds rather well to the Pauline concept of the Inner Person. Visually, his trichotomy can be represented by something similar to figure 1:[130] In addition, Heard's terminology of "self-consciousness" for the soul and "God-consciousness" for the spirit bespeaks the divine functionality of the Inner Person (cf. section on the Holy Functions of the Inner Person, above), and yet, the mapping of the spirit to the human conscience does not exclude any person, religious or not.

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[128] Boice, 152.

[129] Gleason L. Archer Jr., "Ecclesiastes," in *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties: Based on the* NIV *and the* NASB, Zondervan's Understand the Bible Reference Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), EPub. Archer (1916–2004) was a biblical scholar and theologian, Professor of Biblical Languages at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, and Professor of Old Testament and Semitics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois.

[130] Mike Riley, "What Does The 'Inward Man' Refer To?," accessed July 31, 2021, https://gospelsnippets.blogspot.com/2014/03/what-does-inward-man-refer-to.html.

## *Chapter Conclusion*

While we may never reach a consensus on what the anthropology or psychology of the apostle Paul really consists in, I propose in this dissertation that there may be certain clues in the Scripture that are clear enough to merit the following summary:

Although the Hellenistic dualist concept of spirit/soul vs. flesh in the manner of good vs. evil abounds in the first century CE, in which the apostles lived, God's extraordinary and commanding revelations to them enable their surpassing the impacts of cultural milieu, to treat the human body as a neutral medium, in which two spiritual forces, one good and the other evil, one from the corrupt, natural person and the other from the new creation, battle for dominance. Having realized this Christian dilemma, the apostles endeavor to educate fellow Christians on how to overcome the powerful, old natural principle so as to allow the new, godly life dwelling in the Inner Person to shine forth as God intends.

The Inner Person, as representing the truest, deepest human self, could be described as the location, if not the ontological identity, of *imago Dei*, in which God made mankind. Christian theologians such as Augustine, Luther, and Calvin tend to understand that the image has been completely lost, "asserting the effacement of the image of God and not merely its defacement."[131] If so, the Inner Person would have lost all its functionality, and would not have been portrayed by the apostle Paul vividly as a significant principle inside a person, which engenders godly inclinations in the person. The present dissertation proposes to use the word *concealment* (an analogous Buddhist concept) in lieu of effacement or defacement, to depict the true, fallen condition of the Inner Person as being hidden, and not eradicated or damaged. However, the concealment is so severe that what resides inside the Inner Person is ordinarily

[131] Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, 13.

beyond our comprehension, that when one happens to encounter it, one is at a loss of words, often likened by mystics as "dark cloud" or "unknowing," such as the following poem by John of the Cross:

> I went in, I knew not where
> and stayed, not knowing, but going
> past the boundaries of knowing.
> …
> The higher up one is lifted,
> the less one perceives by sight
> how the darkest cloud has drifted
> to elucidate the night;
> …
> This wisdom, wise by unknowing,
> wields a power so complete
> that the learned wise men throwing
> wisdom against it compete
> with a force none can defeat …[132]

It seems that in this realm of the deepest part of humanity, when encountering the Divine, the soul's intellect is of no avail, and the wisdom of the secular world becomes null. Yet, for those fortunate enough to experience it, it is more real than any tangible things. Since this is a much deeper territory than the soul, it could very well be the Inner Person that they have entered into.

In conclusion, combining the above discussions on the various spiritual meanings, the holy functions, and the tri-partite understanding of theological anthropology, we have a working definition for our comparative study, in anticipation of receiving further illumination from the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine of Chán Buddhism.

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[132] Rhina P. Espaillat, "I Went In, I Knew Not Where," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, no. 168 (December 2006): 10.

# CHAPTER 3. THE EXPERIENCES OF THE INNER PERSON: THREE CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATIVES

This chapter attempts to examine the experience of three Christian "contemplatives" (or in popular parlance, "mystics") to see their journey toward the Divine and their disclosure of the inferences to the Inner Person. The latter term they may or may not use explicitly, but its reference becomes apparent as we follow their "inward ascension" toward the inward reality. The selection of the first two saintly figures, Augustine of Hippo (354-430, Roman North Africa) and Teresa of Avila (1515-1582, Spain), are largely based on a reading of Louis Dupré and James A. Wiseman's book *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (2001), picking out what I personally perceived as representative spiritual persons that can teach us valuable lessons about the Inner Person, and who also span a wider time and geographical range in the Christian landscape. This selection, therefore, initially also included Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758, America) as a more modern, Protestant, and non-European example, but was later replaced with Catherine of Genoa, for reasons discussed below.

Augustine is a first choice because he is generally considered to be one of the earliest, if not the original, Christian contemplatives who sets the framework for Christian "mysticism" and exerts immeasurable influence on later generations of spiritual writers and pilgrims. A millennium later, Teresa of Avila not only personally experienced the inner Divinity, but was able to evince her understanding of the vast interior cosmos in her *Interior Castle*, which became a classic among subsequent seekers of spirituality, Christian or not. Thus, the justification for covering these two saints is solid enough.

During my research process, I inevitably discovered other very attractive candidates and had considered to replace Edwards with Mdm. Jeanne-Marie Guyon (1648-1717, France), due to

her book, *A Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer*, which depicts her way of interior communication with God. But, finally, the third candidate was settled on Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510, Italy) because of her book, *Dialogues on the Soul and the Body*. This choice admittedly sacrifices certain diversity in geography and chronology (as opposed to Edwards in the colonial America), but after considering her monumental work in the *Dialogue*, which is directly relevant to our topic of the Inner Person, it seems the gain is more substantial than the loss to take up her work. Consideration in favor of Edwards is on his book, *Treaties Concerning Religious Affections*, whereas for Guyon, her teaching on prayer. Intrinsically, these are excellent sources to delve into. However, they are more of an "indirect" way of illustrating the Inner Person. On the contrary, Catherine's writing appears to be a straightforward exposition on the relationship of the human inner "faculties," so to speak, and thus more suitable for our purpose. Besides the fact of the latter's canonization by the Catholic Church, she is also touted as "among the most universal of mystics, and her impact has been incalculable," in the sense that "her pessimistic view of unredeemed flesh and her uncompromising theology of God alone and grace alone made her congenial to many Protestants." What is remarkable is that among the countless later "mystics" influenced by Catherine of Genoa is also Guyon.[1] In a way, Catherine's theology about the depravity of mankind also encompasses many aspects of Protestantism.

This selection obviously must have left out many other interesting and pertinent spiritual giants throughout the long, colorful and copious Christian history. Here, due to the limitation of space, it suffices to say that they will be reserved for further exploration in the future, when this topic of the Inner Person is expanded.

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[1] Donald Christopher Nugent, “The Annihilation of St. Catherine of Genoa,” *Mystics Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1984): 182–83. Nugent (1930–) is associate professor of history at the University of Kentucky, Lexington.

## *The Interior World of Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430)*

While Augustine of Hippo is best known for his steadfast stance of anti-Pelagianism and works as a philosopher, Biblical exegete, and theologian, his spirituality undoubted also helps to set the tone for the Latin Church of his time, and has far-reaching influences even in today's world, Christian and secular. Some of his most significant influences are: (1) Medieval Scholastics and universities are founded on Augustine's discourses pertaining to faith and reason. (2) Western contemplatives owe much to the emphasis on the love of God in Augustine's writings. (3) The Reformation and Counter-Reformation movements engage their debates on nature vs. grace largely on Augustinian theology. (4) Negatively, this theology provokes much disdain from the eighteenth century Enlightenment, especially because his teaching on the original sin encumbers human perfection. (5) Being a brilliant Christian Platonist, he sets the stage for the integration between Christendom and classical Platonian/Aristotelian theism. (6) He holds considerable sway over innumerable philosophers and theologians, such as Anselm, Aquinas, Bellarmine, Petrarch, Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Freud, and many others.[2] So influential is this saint, that most of his extant representative works, such as *Confessiones* (AD 397-400), *De Civitate Dei Contra Paganos* (*The City of God against the Pagans*, 413-26), *Retractationes* (*Reconsiderations*, 426–427), *De Doctrina Christiana* (*Christian Doctrine*, 396/397, 426) and *De Trinitate* (*The Trinity*, 399/400–416/421) are still been re-translated, re-analyzed, and widely discussed and debated even in the present tense.[3]

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[2] Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions 38 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 3–4. Chadwick (1920–2008) was Regius Professor at both the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

[3] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "St. Augustine" by James O'Donnel, accessed September 26, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Augustine.

Regarding Augustine's inner life, it is the *Confessions* that we will concentrate our study on, due largely to its candid and incisive personal self-exposition. The professor of philosophy of the Catholic University of America, John Kenneth Ryan, has such praises for this book:

> … no writer ever went deeper into his own character and deeds, passed keener judgments upon himself, or revealed himself more fully and more humbly to others. It may be asserted also that no writer of his own life's story had such wealth of thought and feeling to draw upon as had St. Augustine. For this reason, his book is not only a most penetrating psychological study and a unique document for understanding the spiritual and ascetical life, but it is also a storehouse of thought for the philosopher and the theologian, and for others as well. … [The Book is] a threefold confession. It is a confession of sins, a confession of faith, and a confession of praise. … What he provides by way of autobiography in Books 1–9 is essentially spiritual biography; it is primarily an account of his interior life rather than of his outward deeds.[4]

Augustine was not a Christian by birth, having a devout Christian mother but a pagan father. He was converted to Christianity after spending some youthful years wandering in somewhat lustful indulgences. His conversion experience was not unlike that of the apostle Paul en route to Damascus, in that Augustine was also graciously visited by God unexpectedly, because, though his first vision was the consequence of adhering to Plotinus' admonition "to return into myself," Augustine was not in full compliance of Platonic rules of virtue:[5]

> In Platonist terms, however, it was most surprising. Young Augustine had not been practising the prescribed virtues of courage, justice and self-control. He was not in a quiet place. He was agitated by the surrounding clamour of Milan and his futile career. He was still revelling in sex and was roasting … in the 'bull of Phalaris'. He was a full-time teacher of rhetoric who had never tried to turn inwards before, but his very first attempt produced 'incredible' results.[6]

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[4] Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday Religion, 1988).

[5] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), Book VII, x (16). See endnote 18, Adobe PDF eBook.

[6] Robin Lane Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions*, First US ed (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Fox (1946–) is an ancient historian, and Emeritus Fellow of New College, Oxford and Reader in Ancient History at the University of Oxford.

It is perhaps this unearned divine favor which prompts Augustine to see in the apostle Paul's writings the sovereignty and predestination of God, as opposed to the human-centeredness of Pelagius (c. AD 390 – 418), for Augustine knows too well the deeply entangled sinful nature inside him. Yet, the grace of God descends upon him as soon as he shows a willingness to search for the Real. In fact, not only does he "succeed" to have a glimpse of the divine Light on his initial inward attempt, he encounters two more such supernatural "ascension" experiences, or visions, with the last one being compared by him to the apostle Paul's ascent into "the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2).

Since he is by far the most proliferate and articulate of ancient Christian authors, it would be revealing to study Augustine's thoughts, especially in the acclaimed autobiographical work, the *Confessions*, to see how the early Christian saint's Inner Person was awakened to change the entire course of his life toward the service of God.[7]

## Three Divine Visions

In fully disclosing his visionary experiences through the *Confessions*, even after more than a decade's time have passed since the wondrous episodes occurred, Augustine is considered a true literary and theological vanguard – his narratives are touted by Robin Lane Fox as "the first detailed accounts of such an experience by a Christian in the Latin West, except for the visions of martyrs while awaiting their day of death. They [Augustine's works] have had a decisive effect on subsequent accounts of mystic visions and their interpretation in the next thousand years of Western Christianity."[8] Insofar as contemplative experiences are concerned, ancient Christian works of the caliber of *Confessions* rarely exist. John Peter Kenney concisely

[7] Chadwick, *Augustine*, 1.
[8] Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions*.

defines mysticism "as the apex of personal religious experience, in which the self experiences spiritual reality immediately … intense, psychologically distinct from ordinary consciousness, resistant to linguistic description, non-habitual and highly unusual, episodic, transitory … a mental state, a psychological event." As such, he deems the *Confessions* to be an exception of Christian writings in antiquity, in that it "appears to conform to this [mystic] model of personal experience."[9]

Scholars interested in analyzing Augustine's so-called "ascension narratives" mostly concentrate on a narrow section in his *Confessions*, viz. Book VII x (16) through Book IX x (25). This section is his description of what transpired during his earlier Christian quest, prior to baptism, for the true Being, after reading the writings of Plotinus and following the instruction therein "to return into myself."[10] Augustine did not seem to have struggled or make any strenuous efforts before the astonishment arrived, because he immediately describes his internal journey under divine guidance and empowerment to "[enter] into my innermost citadel." How did he enter? "With my soul's eye" [VII.x (16)] – here again he might be alluding to Plotinus: "For what is doing the seeking is a soul … so that it should first of all learn about itself; whether it has the ability for seeking such things, whether it has the right sort of 'eye' that is able to see,

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[9] John Peter Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Re-Reading the* Confessions (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2. Kenney (1952–) is Dean and Professor of Religious Studies at St Michael's College.

[10] Plotinus, *Plotinus: The Enneads*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2018), 5.1.1. This section is what Chadwick denotes as the source of Augustine's inward turning, in that Plotinus advises those seeking "the highest or first … the One" to do two things: (1) to know the despicable disposition of the natural soul, and (2) "to teach the soul to remember the sort of lineage it has and what its worth is," which is effectively what Augustine interprets as inward turning. But, in section 1.6.9, Plotinus teaches the way of seeing beauty in a "good soul" – "*Go back into yourself and look*. If you do not yet see yourself as beautiful … you should remove superfluities and straighten things that are crooked, work on the things that are dark, making them bright, and not stop … until the divine splendour of virtue shines in you, until you see 'Self-Control enthroned on the holy seat.'" (emphasis added)

and whether it is fitting for it to seek these things. … if they are of the same lineage, it is fitting for it to seek them, and it is possible to find that which it is seeking."[11]

In his rapture he "saw … the immutable light higher than my mind … utterly different from all our kinds of light … It was superior because it made me. … When I first came to know you, you raised me up to make me see that what I saw is Being," [VII.x (16)] on which Kenny commented, "And this true Being that he entered was God."[12] Other than the vision of light, Augustine also unmistakably heard divine words "from far away: 'Now, I am who I am.' (Exod. 3:14) I heard in the way one hears within the heart, and all doubt left me" [VII.x (16)]. But, such a soul-transforming experience could not last, for "I was not stable in the enjoyment of my God. I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight. With a groan I crashed into inferior things. This weight was my sexual habit. But with me there remained a memory of you." [VII.xvii (23)] Even if the experience is ephemeral, Augustine did gain valuable insights and lessons: at least he no longer doubted, his sinful sexual habit was exposed under the divine searchlight, and he obtained a memory of God!

Shortly after this first experience, Augustine describes another similar incidence during his contemplation about "beauty of bodies, whether celestial or terrestrial, and what justification I had for giving an unqualified judgement on mutable things." As he concludes that "the unchangeable and authentic eternity of truth" surpassed his "mutable mind," he

> step by step … ascended from bodies to the soul … and from there to its inward force … From there again I ascended to the power of reasoning to which is to be attributed the power of judging the deliverances of the bodily senses. This power, which in myself I found to be mutable, raised itself to the level of its own intelligence, and led my thinking out of the ruts of habit. … So in the flash of a trembling glance it attained to that which is. At that moment I saw your 'invisible nature understood through the things which are made' (Rom. 1: 20). But I did not

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[11] Plotinus, 5.1.1.

[12] Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, 3.

> possess the strength to keep my vision fixed. My weakness reasserted itself, and I returned to my customary condition. I carried with me only a loving memory and a desire for that of which I had the aroma but which I had not yet the capacity to eat. [VII.xvii (23)]

This second extraordinary vision, similarly to the first, seemed to have come so naturally, but its zenith also quickly faded away, again due to human weakness, leaving only a wonderful memory. What is different this time is that Augustine was not following the Plotinist practice of inwardness, but was contemplating on value judgments. Also, his desire for God was aroused, as he knew that this was only a foretaste, an enchanting whiff of the fragrance but not an actual participation of the feast. In this narrative, there is a hint of "trichotomy" in the ascension from body to soul, to "inward force," and finally to the "power of reasoning" and "its own intelligence," although any clear demarcations are difficult to see.

By far, the most well-known and unique vision of Augustine is his third one (and the last one, as disclosed), which occurred in Ostia on the Tiber. It has been attributed "perhaps the most famous spiritual experience in Christian literature after St. Paul's vision on Damascus road."[13] The peculiarity of this vision is that it is a "dual-vision," so to speak, shared by him and his beloved, pious mother, Monica, whom he describes as the woman "who brought me to birth both in her body so that I was born into the light of time, and in her heart so that I was born into the light of eternity." [IX.viii (17)] They had just travelled from Milan, bound for their hometown in Africa. Inside their lodge, overlooking a garden through a window, the mother and the son were by themselves and conversed "very intimately … searching together in the presence of the truth which is you [God] yourself." They imagined the bliss of eternal life for the saints, and then

> with the mouth of the heart wide open … drank in the waters flowing from your spring on high, 'the spring of life' (Ps. 35:10) which is with you. Sprinkled with this due to the limit of our capacity, our minds attempted in some degree to reflect on so great a reality. … Our minds were lifted up by an ardent affection towards

[13] Kenney, 292.

> eternal being itself. Step by step we climbed beyond all corporeal objects and the heaven itself, where sun, moon, and stars shed light on the earth. We ascended even further by internal reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered into our own minds. We moved up beyond them so as to attain to the region of inexhaustible abundance … There life is the wisdom by which all creatures come into being … while we talked and panted after it [wisdom], we touched it in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of the heart. And we sighed and left behind us 'the firstfruits of the Spirit' (Rom. 8: 23) bound to that higher world, as we returned to the noise of our human speech … [IX.x (23-24)]

Again, the third vision is short-lived as the previous two. This narrative contains a more detailed account of the actual ascent, in which Augustine is not only speaking for himself, but for his mother as well, as though their experiences were synchronized, identical and inseparable – indeed a very distinctive way of fellowship between two believers throughout Christian history. This time, there is no negative retrospection whatsoever on the part of Augustine about his fallen nature weighing down on this short sublime spiritual encounter with the Holy One, no regrets for the transience of this vision. Augustine seems to be satisfied with this momentary touch of Wisdom as a final episode of spiritual vision in his life. Almost immediately afterwards, Monica departed the world, and Augustine turned from the initial enthusiasm in personal experience to ecclesiastic administration and writing, which proved to be much more valuable for the development of the fledgling Christian Church. But the vividness of these memories remains in him so firmly that he is able to recall and put them in the *Confessions* eleven years later.

## Taxonomy of Augustinian Visions

As a truth seeker and born-again Christian, how does Augustine associate his wondrous visions with the Bible, and especially with the apostle Paul? According to Fox, it is not in the *Confessions*, written after the last visionary event at Ostia, but almost three decades later, in *De Genesi ad Litteram* (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, AD 404-420), that Augustine makes this

connection with "the crucial text for his understanding, [which is] Paul's words about his own ascent to heaven (2 Cor. 12.1–4)."[14, 15] What interests scholars most in this exegetical work is book XII (the first eleven books are orderly interpretation of the beginning of Genesis), which singularly concentrates on just one word, *paradisus*. Here, Augustine raises the questions: when the apostle Paul speaks of being "caught up into the third heaven" in 2 Cor. 12:2-4, what exactly is that place? If there are three heavens, does any of them equate to *paradisus*?[16] Francis X. Newman summarizes Augustine's conclusion:

> The three Pauline "heavens" are really figures for the three kinds of human vision, that is, the three fundamental modes of human awareness. The first of these is the *visio corporalis*, the literal sight of the eye or, more generally, knowledge by means of the external senses. The second is the *visio spiritualis* or *imaginativa*, knowledge by means of the imagination. In "spiritual" vision we do not see bodies themselves, but images that have corporeal shape without corporeal substance. Dreams, for example, are a sub-class of the *visio spiritualis*. The third and highest of the classes of vision is *intellectualis*, the direct cognition of realities such as God, the angels, *caritas* [charity], etc., which have neither corporeal substance nor corporeal shape.[17]

Isabel Moreira observes the priority and inter-dependence of the three tiers of visions this way: the corporeal vision is animated by the imaginative vision to handle information for retainment in the memory; in turn, the imaginative vision requires the intellectual power to comprehend and translate the vision. But the imaginative does not depend on the corporeal, nor does the intellectual rely on the other two, because it is the lower category that is dependent on the higher one, not the other way around. The ultimate, intellectual vision, then, is simply "pure

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[14] Roland J. Teske, introduction to *On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees ; and, On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, an Unfinished Book*, by Augustine, The Fathers of the Church, v. 84 (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1990), 3, ProQuest Ebook Central. Teske (1934–2015) was a Roman Catholic priest of the Jesuit order and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Marquette University.

[15] Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions*.

[16] Francis X. Newman, "St. Augustine's Three Visions and the Structure of the Commedia," *Modern Language Notes* 82, no. 1 (1967): 58, https://doi.org/10.2307/2908161. Newman (1931–) has served on the faculty of Binghamton University State University of New York.

[17] Newman, 58–59.

knowledge and understanding." And in connection with celestial realm, "to each of these vision categories Augustine assigned a corresponding gradation of heaven."[18]

Biblical examples for these three type of visions – corporeal, imaginative, and intellectual – can be found in, respectively: 1) Moses "seeing God" in the burning bush, 2) the apostle John's apocalyptic visions of the end times, and 3) the apostle Paul's experience of rapture into the third heaven. The first two are deemed indirect divine visions through images; and only the last, belonging to the intellectual category, can be considered "a direct intuition of God Himself."[19] Since this intellectual vision is autonomous from the lower two classes, "this means that it has no empirical foundations, and is separate from any sense experience. It is removed, therefore, from the context of *a posteriori* judgment and cannot be deceived." Augustine even attributes infallibility to it for being a type of internalized knowledge and insight of the intellect. Through it, the soul understands only the truth; and rejects whatever is untrue.[20] This classification of the three types or levels of visions provides the ground for us to analyze Augustine's anthropology in the next subsection.

## Analysis of Augustine's Visions

### *The Strong Plotinian Influence*

To be noted first, from what is presented hitherto, is that Augustine is definitely not a monist concerning the human composition, because he does distinguish the physical body and the immaterial soul, owing to the tremendous Plotinist influence on him. The degree of such

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[18] Isabel Moreira, "Augustine's Three Visions and Three Heavens in Some Early Medieval Florilegia," *Vivarium* 34, no. 1 (1996): 3. Moreira is Professor of History at the University of Utah. See Appendix B for a detailed explanation of the three types of vision frequently mentioned by spiritual contemplatives.

[19] Newman, "St. Augustine's Three Visions and the Structure of the Commedia," 59.

[20] Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, 131.

influence can be seen from the vocabulary he employs, such as "eye of the soul" (*Enneads* 1.6.8 & 9; 5.1.1), "being" (6.1), "that which is" (5.3), "intellect" (1.1.8), "immortality of the soul" (4.7.10 & 12), the dependence and derivation of the soul on/from the Intellect (5.1.3), and many other words and phrases.[21] However, as a sober Christian, writing the book after a decade of devotion to the Christian Scriptures and doctrines of the Church, Augustine does not indiscriminately adopt Plotinus' philosophy. While Plotinus could only speak of the One or the Good as that indefinite entity which/who is the uncreated and the ultimate Reality, Augustine is confident to identify the Christian God and Christ specifically.

Augustine also does not subscribe to the Plotinian hierarchy of the One/the Good, followed by (the universal) Being or Intellect, and then the (universal) Soul (5.1.10), the latter two giving birth to individual intellects and souls respectively (4.3.5). In Plotinus, Intellect produces and then unites with Being (6.2.8); the soul, as an image of the Intellect, is divine (5.1.3 & 10), but the soul is limited due to the impediment of the body (6.9.10); and therefore, self-cleansing is necessary before the soul is able to see the divine (1.6.9; 4.7.10). Although it is Plotinus who pulls Augustine out of the mire of the Manichean materialism – "The Manichees had turned me away from [God's Church]. I thought it shameful to believe you [God] to have the shape of the human figure, and to be limited by the bodily lines of our limbs. When I wanted to think of my God, I knew of no way of doing so except as a physical mass." V.x (19), these spiritual concepts of Neoplatonism are nowhere to be found in Augustine's *Confessions*. His effortless (unearned and not merit-based) experience of the visions has taught him well about the sovereign grace of God, and his subsequent immersion in Christianity instills in him the free, humanly undeserved, salvation of Christ.

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[21] Plotinus, *Plotinus*. (same below)

Basically, the immaterial entities as described in Plotinus' *Enneads* unmistakably assert their sway over Augustinian psychology and theology, but are adapted by him to conform to his understanding of the Christian Scriptures and doctrines. "Plotinus provided Augustine with a model and a vocabulary for a mystical quest directed to the union of the soul with God in a beatific vision."[22] Kenny agrees with this assessment: "Augustine's *Confessions* is not a Neoplatonist treatise. What Plotinus offered him was the philosophical underpinnings from which to begin his articulation of transcendentalist Christianity and the cultural warrant for some of the main outlines of monotheism."[23] Augustine himself knows and records his departure from Neoplatonism, as he confesses after the first two visions:

> Where was the charity which builds on the foundation of humility which is Christ Jesus? When would the Platonist books have taught me that? I believe that you wanted me to encounter them before I came to study your scriptures. Your intention was that the manner in which I was affected by them should be imprinted in my memory, so that when later I had been made docile by your books and my wounds were healed by your gentle fingers, I would learn to discern and distinguish the difference between presumption and confession, between those who see what the goal is but not how to get there and those who see the way which leads to the home of bliss, not merely as an end to be perceived but as a realm to live in. [VII.xx (26)]

## *A Multi-Layered Soul*

But, the present momentous concern is: how does the Augustinian anthropology relate to our Inner Person? First, we observe that the soul, the non-corporeal part of humankind, as betokened in the *Confessions* is not just a simple, straightforward, and indivisible "entity," but, rather, a complex, sophisticated, and multi-layered human "faculty" deeply embedded inside. Augustine, of course, does not scientifically or systematically dissect the soul to provide us its

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[22] Augustine, *Confessions*, Translator's Introduction.

[23] Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, 52.

anatomy. Still, the discerning reader can perhaps distinctly identify something deeper and more fundamental than just the superficial, collective soul in his writing.

For example, in the portrayal of his first vision at VII.x (16), he mentions that he saw it using his "soul's eye." One can certainly argue that it is an anthropomorphic language that he uses. But, if we suppose that Augustine has described it as literally as he understands it, if the soul is a faculty of mankind, what, then, is the eye of the soul? An organ within a faculty? Meanwhile, he also hears the divine speech "in the way one hears within the heart," as if the heart has a natural, innate auditory function. So, it is with the heart, not "the ear of the soul," that he receives God's words, but with "the eye of the soul" that he sees this vision. Indeed, this is a very peculiar depiction of his spiritual experience involving both visual and auditory senses with receptacles of the inner soul.

The peculiarity does not stop at the first vision. In his second vision, at VII.xvii (23), he "ascended from bodies to the *soul* … and from there to *its inward force* … From there again [he] ascended to *the power of reasoning* … which … raised itself to *the level of its own intelligence* …" (emphasis added). From this paragraph, we are told that, at least in Augustine's perception, the soul has several levels that are higher above and deeper inside, which make possible some sort of "movement" into them – therefore the name, ascension.

### *A Direct Communication from God*

In the third vision, at IX.x (23), Augustine changes his language again, describing the ascent shared by him and his mother, that after rising above the physical heaven, "we ascended even further by internal reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered into our own *minds*. We moved up beyond them so as to attain to *the region of inexhaustible*

*abundance* … we touched [wisdom] in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of *the heart*" (emphasis added). Again, we see the multiplicity of the incorporeal human interior outlined in a hierarchy of sorts, but no exactitude is given as to what position each of the components occupies.

A further reflection on the Ostia vision occurs shortly after:

> Therefore we said: If to anyone the tumult of the flesh has fallen silent, if the images of earth, water, and air are quiescent, if the heavens themselves are shut out and the very soul itself is making no sound and is surpassing itself by no longer thinking about itself, if all dreams and visions in the imagination are excluded, if all language and every sign and everything transitory is silent … if after this declaration they were to keep silence, having directed our ears to him that made them, then *he alone would speak not through them but through himself*. We would hear his word, not through the tongue of the flesh, nor through the voice of an angel, nor through the sound of thunder, nor through the obscurity of a symbolic utterance. *Him who in these things we love we would hear in person without their mediation*. That is how it was when at that moment we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things. If only it could last, and other visions of a vastly inferior kind could be withdrawn! Then this alone could ravish and absorb and enfold in inward joys the person granted the vision (IX.x (25), emphasis added).

Here Augustine concludes the Ostia experience, and probably also the other two visions summarily, by noting the condition for a direct communication with God – the silencing of bodily senses and external stimuli, including even the soul's own self-regard and imagination, leaving out everything but the undivided, attentive regard to the Creator. Under such "ideal" circumstance, He would communicate Himself without the mediation of the created order, but immediately ("through Himself"). What this means is impossible to grasp for someone without a similar experience as Augustine's, since without any medium, when God "speaks through Himself," as in a vacuum, how can any created being possibly receive the divine wavelength, the vibration of His word, let alone understand it?

Nevertheless, it is possible for us to take a bold "educated guess" through the help of the Scripture: perhaps this divine disclosure resembles the psalmist's words, "deep calls unto deep"

(Psalm 42:7, NKJV), which we venture to "borrow," not literally but allegorically, to signify "the deep things of God calling to the deep things of man."[24] Allegorical interpretation, if done appropriately, may not be so arbitrary as it seems. After all, Christians almost universally accepts what Carole Slade avers, that "the Old Testament, according to this mode of interpretation, not only refers to the history of the Jewish people but also forecasts the history of the Christian people narrated in the New Testament."[25]

Furthermore, and more pertinently, there could very well be a direct linkage between the Spirit of God and the spirit of a person, since this is conceivably the only way to bypass all other physical, mental, or psychological mediation – a direct communication between the Divine Spirit and the human spirit, the latter likely pointing to the Inner Person! In this assumption, then, we may suppose that the human spirit, the Inner Person, is the highest inner faculty in our created being that is compatible with the Holy Spirit. As amply stated in the creation narrative in Genesis, the repeated principle of the creature following "after its kind" or "according to its kind" mandates that only "like-kinds" may properly commune with one another! And this is possibly what conclusion Augustine might have reached about the immediate divine-human communication, although he does not spell it out precisely in such tripartite language.

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[24] Bradenton Herald, "What God Sees When He Sees You," accessed October 10, 2021, https://www.bradenton.com/living/religion/article34573137.html.

[25] Carole Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila: Author of a Heroic Life* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 39. Slade is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University.

# The Augustinian Allegorical Exegesis of Genesis

## *The Allegorical Method of Biblical Exegesis*

Besides the discourse on his visionary experiences, if there is any other place in the *Confessions* that contains even closer depictions resembling the Inner Person, it is in Book XII, in which Augustine expounds the Genesis creation story. The way of his interpretation, according to modern exegetical standards, is sometimes bordering on "eisegesis" – reading one's own ideas into the text. But then, in his time, there exist no such Biblical criticisms as high, low, historical, literary, redaction, etc., nor any such hypothesis as Documentary or Supplementary. The methods that Augustine uses, by his own admission, are inherited from his baptizer, Ambrose (c. 340 – 397), the bishop of Milan.[26] Fox agrees and provides more details:

> Augustine's acceptance of Ambrose's allegorical approach marks a cardinal point in his development. As a priest, and then for the rest of his life as a preacher, he himself would apply allegory to the scriptures and weave patterns of meaning from their raw material. He would not see them as subjective ingenuity. … 'Veils', he learned from Ambrose, had been laid across words of scripture, and only in Christian humility can we draw them aside. We can then grasp with love, a gift of the Spirit, what the Spirit 'gives life to' beneath.[27]

And Augustine himself has a high esteem of Ambrose's methodology: "I was delighted to hear Ambrose in his sermons to the people saying, as if he were most carefully enunciating a principle of exegesis: 'The letter kills, the spirit gives life' (2 Cor. 3:6). Those texts which, taken literally, seemed to contain perverse teaching he would expound spiritually, removing the mystical veil." [VI.iv (6)] Taking this cue, the bishop of Hippo gives a series of messages on the creation account of Genesis for his audience. At this point, his reader may be mystified about the inclusion of this seeming unrelated exegetical chapter on God's creation; after all, what does it

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[26] Augustine, *Confessions*, Introduction.

[27] Fox, *Augustine: Conversions to Confessions*.

have to do with Augustine's confessions? The below analysis from the perspective of the Inner Person would perhaps serve as a plausible explanation.

### *The Heaven of Heaven in God's Creation*

One of the most interesting innovations introduced by Augustine's allegorical Biblical interpretation, as related to our central subject, is his view on the heaven, or more precisely, the "heaven of heaven," which he distinguishes from the visible firmament. He focuses on this term, found in Psalm 115:16, and asks rhetorically: "Where is the heaven which we do not see, compared with which everything we can see is earth? … in comparison with 'the heaven of heaven', even the heaven of our earth is earth." [XII.ii (2)] In so saying, he is treating all visible world as "earth," acknowledging only the invisible "heaven of heaven" as the real heaven in God's initial creation act. As such, he attributes to it certain theological properties:

> No doubt the 'heaven of heaven' which you made in the beginning is a kind of creation in the realm of the *intellect*. Without being coeternal with you, … it nevertheless participates in your *eternity*. From the sweet happiness of *contemplating* you, it finds [268] power to check its *mutability*. Without any lapse to which its createdness makes it liable, by cleaving to you it escapes all the revolving vicissitudes of the temporal process (XII.ix (9), emphasis added).

Here we see the familiar Plotinian category, "intellect," appearing again to denote the highest level of consciousness in the created order. Similar to the analysis in the above subsection, this realm bears uncanny resemblance to our subject under investigation, the Inner Person in that it is created but immortal, even immutable, owing to its affinity with the Creator. In the eyes of the apostle Paul, contrasting with the outward person that is decaying continuously, this Inner Person is "renewed day by day," apparently because it is rejuvenated by a divine Source of life incessantly. This close linkage with God does not occur under any moral or ethical precondition, and does not seem to have been affected by the fall of humanity. If not normally

sensed, it is perhaps because of external encumbrances and pollutions that cover it hermetically. Moreover, if we equate Augustine's "intellect" with the Inner Person, he considers it to be able to stay in the state of contemplation of God – an insinuation of its "personality"!

### *The Inner Person's Inter-Personal Relations with God*

Further down in the same book, at XII.xi (12), we find more personal relationship of this intellectual realm with Divinity:

> the 'heaven of heaven', … Its *delight is exclusively in you*. In an unfailing purity it satiates its thirst in you. It never at any point betrays its mutability. You are *always present* to it, and it concentrates *all its affection* on you. It has no future to expect. It suffers *no variation* and experiences *no distending* in the successiveness of time. O blessed creature, if there be such: happy in cleaving to your felicity, happy to have you as eternal inhabitant and its source of light! I do not find any better name for the Lord's 'heaven of heaven' (Ps. 113: 16) than your *House*. There your delight is contemplated without any failure or wandering away to something else. The *pure heart* enjoys absolute concord and unity in the unshakeable peace of holy spirits, the citizens of your city in the heavens above the visible heavens (emphasis added).

If not for the sudden turn from "heaven of heaven" to "God's House" and "pure heart," we would think that Augustine is describing some celestial or spiritual body, outside of the mundane world and not humanly related. However, what we read here can probably be linked with the mystical, inseverable inter-personal relation of the Inner Person with God. As alluded before, traces or suggestions of it could be discovered throughout the entire Bible. Taking the cue from Augustine's passage and associating it with the Inner Person, Biblical references in correspondence can be found: God is its exclusive delight, as confessed by the apostle Paul, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22). God is always present to it, according to Jesus: "… the Father … shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). It does not vary or distend (in the sense of decay), claimed by Paul:

"… the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). It is called the Lord's House: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). It is a pure heart: "… the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible …" (1 Peter 3:4). These references coming from Jesus and the apostles Paul and Peter could possibly link the Inner Person with Augustine's term of *intellect* in his depiction of its relationship with God.

### *The Blueprint of the Primal Creation Encompassing the Inner Person*

At XII.xiii (16), Augustine reiterates this understanding of heaven in God's initial creation act, but provides further justification for this reading and more details. Because, he asserts, the very first creation of heaven and earth "does not mention a day as the time," meaning time and its associated material universe had possibly not yet begun to exist, there is good reason to interpret the heaven as "the 'heaven of heaven', the intellectual, non-physical heaven where the intelligence's act of knowing is a matter of simultaneity – not in part, not in an enigma, not through a mirror, but complete, in total openness, 'face to face' (1 Corinthians 13: 12)." If we further interpret this *intellect* as God's first creation of the Inner Person, then, in effect, its primal knowledge of God is also the eschatological version as seen by the apostle Paul, which is without the hindrance of the corrupt flesh. Such unadulterated, prelapsarian knowledge "is not of one thing at one moment and of another thing at another moment, but is concurrent without any temporal successiveness." As difficult as it is for the flesh-encumbered, sin-laden humanity to imagine, far less to achieve, Augustine already could envision such direct divine knowledge as created by God in the beginning, which will be restored in the eschaton. In this analogy, the earth in Genesis 1:1, described by Augustine as "utterly formless … 'the earth invisible and

unorganized,'" would be comparable to a "proto-conception," in which the blueprints of the material cosmos is stored, pending realization.

Next, at XII.xv (19), Augustine asks rhetorically, "Do you deny that there is a sublime created realm cleaving with such pure love to the true and truly eternal God that … it never detaches itself from him and slips away into the changes and successiveness of time, but rests in utterly authentic contemplation of him alone?" Although this is called a "realm," because it refers to the "heaven of heaven," it is, nevertheless, endowed with personal traits, such as love and contemplation, wherefore not incompatible with the Inner Person. It is also not unrelated to humans, since Augustine also calls it a "House of God" which "is not made of earth, nor is it corporeal made from any celestial mass, but is spiritual and participates in your eternity, because it is without stain for ever. For you have 'established it for ever and ever.'" This is reminiscent of Paul's teaching: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). Or Peter's saying: "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Is it coincidental that both apostles write about the Inner Person, presumably as God's chosen abode?

### *The Heaven of Heaven as the First Creation – Wisdom*

Lastly, Augustine also takes "time" into consideration in regard to this created, undefiled, and everlasting realm. At XII.xv (20), he makes the following statement and connects this realm with wisdom:

> We do not find that time existed before this created realm, for 'wisdom was created before everything' [Proverbs 8:22-30] … Evidently 'wisdom' in this text is that which is created, an intellectual nature which is light from contemplation of the light. … there was a wisdom created before all things which is a created thing,

> the rational and intellectual mind of your pure city, our 'mother which is above and is free' (Gal. 4:6) and is 'eternal in the heavens' (2 Cor. 5:1). In this text 'heavens' can only be 'the heavens of heavens' which praise you (Ps. 148:4); this is also the Lord's 'heaven of heaven' (Ps. 113:16). … it precedes the creation of time; yet it is created first of all things.

The Proverb passage about Wisdom that Augustine applies to this realm, according to most later Biblical commentators, should refer to the uncreated Λόγος, the Son of God, and not to any created entity, not even to the heaven of heaven. For example, Charles J. Ellicott, and Henry Spencer-Jones both hold this view.[28, 29,] Nonetheless, Augustine's Biblical approach, as mentioned above, has been allegorical or spiritual, and not literal or canonical. This method provides him ample freedom to give expression to his mystical understanding, which, in this particular usage, avers equality between the realm of the heaven of heaven (our understanding of the Inner Person) and Wisdom, as the primary creature prior to every others, even before the beginning of time. This realm is also in apposition to "the rational and intellectual mind of [God's] pure city." In Augustine's view, and also in Neoplatonism, the intellectual mind should be the highest consciousness of the soul, which, in trichotomist language, is none other than the spirit hidden deeply within the soul. Plotinus is known for saying that the (universal) Soul comes from the (universal) Intellect in the following quotation (note particularly the capitalization):

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[28] "It is most likely … that the sense of the passage is that Wisdom was 'formed' or 'begotten' before the Creation, comp. Psalm 104:24. This agrees with the rendering of the most important Greek translation, the Septuagint. When in Christian times it was observed how well the description of Wisdom in Job and Proverbs harmonised with that of God the Son in the New Testament, such passages as this were universally applied to Him, and the present one was rightly interpreted as describing His eternal generation from the Father. Such was the view, for instance, of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian." Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 4, *Job-Isaiah* (Wipf & Stock, 2016), 317.

[29] "There can be no doubt that he was guided in his diction so as to give expression to the idea of him whom St. John calls the Word of God. The language used is not applicable to an impersonal quality, an abstract faculty of God. It describes the nature and office of a Person; and who that Person is we learn from the later Scriptures, which speak of Christ as the 'Wisdom of God' (Luke 11:49) and 'the Power of God and the Wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24)." Henry Spence-Jones and Joseph S. Excell, *The Complete Pulpit Commentary: A Exposition, Homiletics, and Homilies Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 4, *Psalms to Song of Songs* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva Publication, 2013).

> soul … is an image of Intellect. Just as spoken words are an expressed principle of thinking, so, too, Soul is an expressed principle of Intellect … Since, then, Soul is derived from Intellect, it is intellectual, and its own intellect is found in its acts of calculative reasoning, and its perfection, too, comes from Intellect … Its real existence, then, comes from Intellect, and its actuality as an expressed principle derived from Intellect occurs when Intellect is seen in it.[30]

As Slade rightly observes, "Augustine's *Confessions* demonstrates that Christian conversion, hence the writing of Christian spiritual autobiography, depends on typological interpretation of Scripture, specifically, on tropological [moral or figurative] reading."[31] She refers particularly to Augustine's conversion experience in the Milano garden, when he obeyed the repeated child-like voice demanding him to "*tolle lege*" (take up, read), opened the Bible arbitrarily to Romans 13, and received a divine message from the Pauline teaching therein, all because he finally learned to interpret the Scripture "tropologically for the first time. … The [soteriological] impact this reading makes on Augustine illustrates the difference between the simple moral sense, which is closely related to the literal, and the tropological sense."[32] And as related to his innermost self, "in the sentence that he reads, he finds himself interpreted. The scattered self finds itself resumed within the Christian text, which is taken as a symbolic whole."[33] In simpler words, Augustine finds the scriptural passage speaking to his inner self irresistibly.

Thus, by the use of allegorical or spiritual exegesis and forgoing the more restricted, literal Biblical interpretation methods, Augustine is able to circumvent the limitations of a common understanding – that the first verse of Genesis is just a simple act of materialistic

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[30] Plotinus, *Plotinus*, 5.1.3. Note that the capitalized Soul and Intellect denote the universal origins of individual souls and intellects.

[31] Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila*, 40.

[32] Slade, 41.

[33] Lawrence Rothfield, "Autobiography and Perspective in the Confessions of St. Augustine," *Comparative Literature* 33, no. 3 (1981): 221, https://doi.org/10.2307/1770902. Lawrence Rothfield is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Chicago.

creation. In so doing, he has fashioned for himself the space and liberty to delineate what he perceives as a momentous spiritual reality, the sublime "realm of the intellect." His justification for such interpretation is not without warrant, since he rightly points out that this creation is outside of, and prior to, "time" that logically should accompany material existence. According to this Augustinian exegesis, then, some difficult New Testament passages such as Ephesians 1:4 ("According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world …") and 2 Timothy 1:9 ("… according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world.") would naturally fall into place, because he could logically explain the pre-temporal significance of these verses. If we equate his "realm of the intellect" with the Inner Person, then it implies that the latter would take on the attribute of timelessness, or eternity!

## Concluding Remarks on Augustine of Hippo

It is through Augustine's own transcendental visions and detailed recount that we get a glimpse of his interior world, and then through his brilliant theologizing of the contemplation of the invisible realms that we see the richness and possibilities of the multifaceted inner cosmos. "For ancient Christians like Augustine knew – as many today do not – that the interior life of the self discloses more than a complex bundling of mental impressions, but instead betokens a deeper reality – beyond body, mind, and time – a self grounded in the eternal and the divine."[34] What could this "self" be, if it is connected with eternity and God? It may not be too preposterous to surmise that this "self" would be the Inner Person that the apostles made mention of in the Christian New Testament .

[34] Kenney, *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine*, ix.

But, if we are to assign an Augustinian term to the Biblical Inner Person, it would undoubtedly be the "heaven of heaven" that he saw in the Hebrew Bible. Using the creation account of Genesis as an instrument, Augustine illustrates the primacy of the "heaven of heaven" in the creaturely order, which may be taken to correspond to various Scriptural passages that are related to the Inner Person, and especially to Pauline theology. By his unique, but not necessarily extravagant, exegesis, it is not unreasonable to see in Augustine an indirect demonstration of the primordial character of the Inner Person, which would greatly help our understanding of its position, weight, timelessness, and eschatological significance.

## *The Spiritual Marriage of Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)*

In his Ph.D. dissertation, DePrinzio exalts this founder of the reformed female Carmelite order as "the icon of Spanish mysticism." It was she and John of the Cross who arose from the spiritual decadence of their age, "the sixteenth century … crisis in contemplation," to lead a monastic revival which affected not only the ascetic community, but all the spiritually aspired for generations to come.[35] Their wonderful spiritual collaboration became a much celebrated interlude in the history of Roman Catholicism, mostly because "they have a knack for transcending the myopias and smallnesses of the concrete circumstances in which all of us live. They are always up to date because their vision and love are rooted in eternity. … they love their fellowmen far more than the worldly possibly could, because they are immersed in the Origin

[35] Kevin M. DePrinzio, "Your Word Pierced My Heart, and I Fell in Love: Teresa of Avila's Reading of Augustine of Hippo's Confessions" (PhD Diss., Catholic Univ. of America, 2017), 195, http://hdl.handle.net/1961/cuislandora:64680. DePrinzio is now the VP for Mission and Ministry at Villanova University in Pennsylvania.

who makes lovable any loveableness anywhere."[36] Her peculiar experience of the human interior world, together with her self-educated proficiency to express her stories with the pen, set her apart as one of Christianity's most cherished contemplative authors. Kavanaugh has such high praise of her: "Among the mystics, Saint Teresa of Avila holds a unique position as a witness to divine realities. Her common sense, humor, and penchant for everyday images liven her writings; but she is above all remarkable for her analytical abilities in probing the mystery of God's workings in the soul."[37]

It is through this precious vessel of God that we will attempt to see another interpretation of the Inner Person, particularly in her two major works, *Libro de su Vida* (1562, *Book of Her Life*) and *Las Moradas del Castillo Interior* (1577, *The Mansions of the Interior Castle*), the former being her autobiographical accounts of life experiences up to the time of writing, and the latter, her theological composition about prayer, written under the demand of her superior.

## The Life of Teresa

Teresa was born Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada in 1515, and changed her name to Teresa of Jesus (Carmelite) ever since the founding of the Reformed Carmel order. Her weighty significance in the history of the church can be gleaned from the posthumous appellations given her: "Mother Founder, 'the Saint,' Mother of Spiritual Seekers, Mystical Doctor, Doctor of the Church, and Patroness."[38] As with many spiritual giants of the past, Teresa's life is plagued by physical illness: "extraordinary continuity and number of physical

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[36] Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel, on Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989).

[37] Kieran Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, by Teresa of Avila, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 1.

[38] Tomás Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila: 100 Themes on Her Life and Work*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2011).

illnesses that beset Teresa from about the age of twenty until her death at sixty-seven." It is well-observed by Dubay that "there is a close correlation between suffering well and growth in prayer depth … trials borne with love and in union with the crucified Beloved make one grow by leaps and bounds." Thus, God subjects her to trials and torments which are unbearable to the earth-bound, but received and embraced submissively by the celestial saint, all because she is sure that He has a great plan for her life. As such, the sufferings are severe and incessant:

> Teresa was in daily discomfort, sometimes in agony. She suffered from fevers, tinnitus and a serious heart condition. So grave were some of her afflictions that she "always nearly lost consciousness" and sometimes completely lost it. … her heart pains were so severe that she felt she was near death … so shriveled and wasted away from a daily purge prescribed for her that she considered her nerves to be shrinking, and she said this caused "unbearable pains". … she was also tubercular. … "almost never, in my opinion, without many pains, and sometimes very severe ones, especially in the heart".[39]

Some scholars have observed that her poor health might have been partly self-inflicted. This is due to the abundant evidence of her inclination for self-mortification, both interiorly and exteriorly. Just some examples from one of her books for spiritual cultivation will suffice to demonstrate the significance of mortification in her thoughts:

> But how inappropriate it is for a person like myself to begin to praise humility and mortification, when these virtues are so highly praised by the King of Glory – a praise exemplified in all the trials He suffered.""[40]

> Why, then, do we shrink from interior mortification, since this is the means by which every other kind of mortification may become much more meritorious and perfect, so that it can then be practised with greater tranquillity and ease? This, as I have said, is acquired by gradual progress and by never indulging our own will and desire, even in small things, until we have succeeded in subduing the body to the spirit.[41]

> By not being good, … I am referring to a want of mortification and an attachment to worldly things and to self-interest … Let anyone who knows that she is not

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[39] Dubay, *Fire Within*.

[40] St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, trans. E. Allison Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2013), 90.

[41] St. Teresa of Avila, 98.

> greatly mortified take my advice and not make her profession if she does not wish to suffer a hell on earth.[42]
>
> For although we allow time for the attainment of complete detachment and mortification in interior matters, in externals this has to be practised immediately, *because of the harm which may otherwise befall the rest*.[43]

However absurd the idea of self-affliction may seem to the modern mindset, Teresa's austere treatment of herself is not forbidden by the Lord specifically, and does not appeared to hinder her relationship with God. On the contrary, it bespeaks a pure heart zealously desiring the love for God, and might even have enhanced her spiritual acuity due to the suppression of physical and mental agitation. In effect, her spiritual power is better exercised without interference, much like the enhancement of remaining sensory organs when certain other part is shut down. This is testified by Teresa herself: "I once had a confessor who subjected me to great mortifications, and who would sometimes distress me and greatly try me by disquieting my mind. But I believe it is he who has done me the most good."[44]

From the following descriptions in her autobiography, her self-mortification might even be sanctioned or commanded by the Lord:

> O God, in how many ways did His Majesty gradually prepare me for the state in which He was to be pleased to use me! In how many ways, against my own will, did He constrain me to exercise restraint upon myself![45] (J. M. Cohen's translation: "Thus, without my willing it, the Lord compelled me to *do violence* to myself").[46]

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[42] St. Teresa of Avila, 106–7. Italics original.

[43] St. Teresa of Avila, 108. Italics original.

[44] Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1957), chap. 26.

[45] Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. E. Allison Peers, Dover, Dover Books on Western Philosophy (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2010), 18.

[46] Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*.

> When I took the habit the Lord at once showed me how great are His favours to those who use force with ("do violence to," Cohen) themselves in order to serve Him.[47]
>
> … it is most important: even though a favour may undoubtedly have come from God, the devil will later be able to practise a deception upon us by treacherously making such use as he can of that very favour against persons who are not strong in the virtues, or detached, or mortified.[48]
>
> Blessed for ever be God, Who in one moment gave the freedom which, despite all the efforts I had been making for so many years, I had never been able to attain, though sometimes I had done such violence to myself that it badly affected my health.[49]
>
> When we exert our utmost efforts ("do violence to ourselves," Cohen) and try in various ways to forgo our rights, the Lord comes to the soul.[50]

The last two quotes nicely evince her conviction in "buffeting" her own body as a means of reining in the fallen human nature. On the positive side, such asceticism draws her toward the Divine presence; on the negative side, it sharpens her discernment of the sources of spiritual encounters lest she might be deceived by the Evil One. As she acknowledges her own humility and unworthiness, and as she realizes the peril of falling from grace regardless of spiritual attainment, she not only justifies, but also welcomes, the sobering bodily mistreatment meted out specifically for her by God or by anyone else. This concept of physical suffering as a check to one's innate depravity is, not surprisingly, of Pauline origin: "but I chastise my body, and bring it into servitude, lest by any means, having preached to others – I myself may become disapproved" (1 Corinthians 9:27, YLT).

In sixteenth century Europe, especially for a religious woman, confession and subjection to spiritual direction are two of the most indispensable obligations. For the saint, her rapid spiritual growth since she joined the Carmelite monastery of the Incarnation in 1535 and

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[47] Teresa of Avila, *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, 20.

[48] Teresa of Avila, 117.

[49] Teresa of Avila, 156.

[50] Teresa of Avila, 213.

especially since making her profession two years later leads her to the dilemma that available confessors and directors are no longer sufficiently experienced or knowledgeable to advise her:[51]

> Teresa's account of her experience of confession between 1539 and 1554 suggests that the picture of the ideal confessor offered in confession manuals was hard to match in reality. Part of the difficulty she had is that confessors were often not only unfamiliar with the advanced spiritual teaching which she had derived from her reading of Osuna, but even lacked the necessary learning and virtue.[52]

The terrible encumbrance in health and the poor spiritual guidance she is able to muster does not hinder her spiritual growth in the love for God, which burns like blazing fire in her and stirs her to take up the challenging tasks of founding monasteries. Beginning at age 52 (1567) until her passing away at age 67 (1582), the Spanish Carmelite order witnesses fifteen new monasteries founded by the frail saint, with two additional ones built under her guidance. What is unimaginable is that such tremendous accomplishments have been achieved in the midst of the "roadblocks" constantly opposing her work – "obstacles such as being entangled in lawsuits, mired down in disputes over dowries, tied up in interminable bureaucratic red tape, involved in the political infighting of the Church, and having to deal with unscrupulous businessmen."[53]

Although ecclesiastical officials and Inquisition examiners usually look upon her with suspicious eyes, even they cannot deny the powerful insights and influences of Teresa. Six years after her most significant spiritual encounters at age 39 (1554, more in next subsection), her career as an influential author begins with the debut of her first treatise, *Spiritual Testimonies* (1560), and spans the rest of her life, until she finished the *Foundations*, a few months before passing away in 1582. Her literary talent and "analytical abilities in probing the mystery of God's

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[51] Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila*.

[52] Elena Carrera, *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography: Authority, Power and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Abingdon, UK: Legenda/Modern Humanities Research, 2005), 95. Elena Carrera is Senior Lecturer in Spanish Golden Age Culture at Queen Mary, University of London.

[53] Teresa of Avila and Marc Foley, *The Book of Her Foundations: A Study Guide*, revised ed. (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2012). Foley is a Discalced Carmelite priest and former chair of the Institute of Carmelite Studies. He serves as director of formation at the Carmelite House of Studies in Washington, D.C.

workings in the soul" captures the notice of her superiors and confessors.[54] In fact, they become the main audience of her works, and even orders her to write against her will, albeit not always with ill intentions. Understandably, such high spirituality as hers is rarely favorably accepted, especially by contemporaries in such patriarchal society. Slade makes an astute observation: "What is known of Teresa's confrontations with the Inquisition indicates that all of her writings, in particular the *Life* but to some extent the other works as well, are Inquisitional documents."[55] With this in mind, when she writes, she must not only navigate the treacherous waters of censorship, which expects her to exhibit a subservient feminine tone and not to show spiritual superiority, but at the same time, try to communicate her true colors without being deceptive, a paradoxical situation aptly portrayed by Weber:

> Teresa must describe her suspect practice of mental prayer and defend the authenticity of the spiritual favors received through it. In other words, her task as a writer is to develop a rhetorical strategy which will allow her to comply with the demands of her addressees, and at the same time communicate a sense of identity independent from the authority they represent. The dual requirements of confession and defense – of obedience and self-assertion – are paradoxical; they constitute an autobiographical double bind.[56]

## The Works of Teresa

Among Teresa's many writings in the last two decades of her life, the most significant ones as considered by scholars are the *Life* (her autobiography of earlier life until 1562, by orders of her confessors), the *Way of Perfection* (written for the edification of her fellow nuns), the *Book of Foundations* (recounting the history of founding convents, also ordered by her superiors),

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[54] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 1.

[55] Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila*, 3.

[56] Alison Weber, "The Paradoxes of Humility: Santa Teresa's Libro de La Vida as Double Bind," *Journal of Hispanic Philology* IX, no. 3 (1985): 211. Alison Weber is Professor Emerita of Spanish at the University of Virginia.

and her masterpiece *The Interior Castle*, in which she explores the human spiritual anthropology as she experiences it).[57]

The final edition of *Life* is finished in 1565. Its purpose is for the examination of her confessors about the earlier part of her life, with accounts of the graces granted by God, her failings, calling, serious sicknesses, and spiritual endeavors. In the middle, she digresses to talk about prayer to inform the reader of the peculiar mystical course by which she was guided towards her life-altering changes. She further accentuates the divine favors that she was granted, both as an apology against the despisers and deniers of such gifts and mysticism, and also as a defense again anthropocentricism, which tends to affirm human ability to earn divine grace.[58]

*The Way of Perfection*, written at around age 47 to 51 (1562 – 1566), is a basic spiritual cultivation guide for the nuns in Teresa's monasteries, but did not fully pass the Catholic censorship until 1569, when it is revised to a more toned-down version. Teresa first states the rationale for the Carmelite reform, and then teaches that prayer life ought to render service to the Church. In order to follow the monastic rule of living a life of ceaseless prayer, peace of the soul is a prerequisite, which predisposes the nun for real prayer growth. To achieve this peace, one must practice detachment of the world, cultivate the love of humanity, and uphold the disposition of humility. She also comments on the prayer, Our Father, and deduce from it the whole spiritual pilgrimage from incipiency to the stage when God binds the soul entirely in union with Him, and bestows the fountain of living water to it.[59]

In 1562, having successfully founded the first monastery, St. Joseph, at Avila, Teresa "was ordered … by my confessor, the Dominican friar father Garcia of Toledo, to write the

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[57] Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*.

[58] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 11.

[59] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 11–12.

history of the foundation of the monastery, together with other matters" (*Foundations*, Prologue). Eleven years and seven more monasteries later, in 1573, another confessor, Father Ripalda, ordered her to take up the task again, in "the honour of our Lord … to give an account of the commencement of the monasteries" (*Foundations*, Preface).[60] It not only records the history of her efforts in building up these monasteries, but also "combines materials from the sacred and the profane, the active and the contemplative life; and she forms with these the brilliant patterns of her spirituality."[61] In her busy life of building monasteries, communicating with others by letters, and poor health, she initially was distressed about the added pressure to write the history, and considered it "as a thing impossible for me." But the word of God came to her: "our Lord said to me, 'Child, obedience gives strength'" (*Foundations*, Prologue). And, indeed, she was divinely empowered to finish the task. The process of writing this book lasted until four months prior to her death in 1582.

The overwhelming majority of Teresian scholars would agree that the most weighty, influential, and brilliantly written work of the saint would be *The Interior Castle*. It is also what most pursuers of contemplative spirituality know the saint by. The idea of writing this book was suggested by Fr. Gratian at her newly established Toledo monastery in Carmel in 1577, when Teresa lamented about the confiscation of her book, *Life*, by the Inquisition. The Carmelite friar, as her confessor at the time and a staunch supporter of her reformation movement, "ordered" her to write a book about the "dwelling places," which she had been personally experiencing for the past five years (since age 57).[62] As in the apostle Paul's description of his own rapture to the third heaven, where he uses the third-person narrative to hide his own identity, in like manner also,

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[60] Saint Teresa, *Book of the Foundations*, trans. John Dalton (London: T. Jones, 1853).

[61] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 12.

[62] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 15–16.

Teresa disguises as an acquaintance of hers in disclosing her interior journey through the seven stages of dwelling places in the interior castle, although "her talents for concealing the identity were abysmally poor."[63] Interestingly, each stage in this interior castle is described plurally as "dwelling places," indicating the vastness or multiplicity of the interior cosmos.

Doctrinally, this book can be divided into two sections. The first three levels of dwelling places are attainable via human exertion, with assistance of ordinary grace, whereas the rest of the four levels of dwelling places are "passive" or "mystical," beyond the humanly reachable realm and only conferred by divine favor.[64] These two realms, human and divine, are termed by Alvarez "a double scale in her experiences. A first series that brought her to human maturity. And another that came upon her in midlife and brought her to Christian plenitude. In books of spiritual theology the first is usually referred to as 'ascetical,' and the second 'mystical.'"[65] Detail synopsis of *The Interior Castle* are provided in the next sub-section as we examine her fascinating mystical experience.

## The Experiences and Narratives of Teresa

During Teresa's profound and prolonged "mystical" experience, which occurred in the last twenty-eight years of her life (1554-1582), she wrote many articles, treatises, and books, in an attempt to convey what she has experienced and learned from the Lord to her intended readers, consisting mostly of her confessors, Catholic officials, Inquisitors, and "her Sisters and daughters, the Discalced Carmelite nuns."[66] The central theme of these writings, inevitably, involves the interior cosmos, which is best represented by the book *The Interior Castle*. This spiritual

[63] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 21.
[64] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 19.
[65] Alvarez, *St. Teresa of Avila*, chap. 50.4.
[66] Kavanaugh, Prologue to *The Interior Castle*, 33.

masterpiece, as the title suggests, contains her understanding of the inner spiritual life as seven mansions, connoting seven progressive spiritual stages inside the interior castle of the soul, and culminating in "the soul [being] permanently transformed into God – the spiritual marriage."[67] Her other major works, such as *Life* and the *Book of the Foundations*, also contributes to our understanding of her concept of the human interior world.

### *Initial Spiritual Encounter*

The beginning of the saint's mystical journey can be traced to what she writes in *Life* (10.1) about her initial feeling of the divine presence, which eliminates all her doubts:

> When I made that inward picture in which I threw myself at Christ's feet, and sometimes also when I was reading, there would come to me unexpectedly such a feeling of the presence of God as made it impossible for me to doubt that He was within me, or that I was totally engulfed in Him. This was no kind of vision … The *soul* is then so *suspended* that it seems entirely outside itself. The *will* loves; the *memory* is, I think, almost *lost*, and the *mind*, I believe, though it is not lost, does *not reason* – I mean that it does *not work*, but stands as if amazed at the many things it *understands*. For God wills it to realize that it understands nothing at all of what His Majesty places before it.[68]

Even in this first taste of interior divinity, she experienced the suspension of the soul's functions as to render the feeling of a great loss – "entirely outside itself," with the memory "almost lost," and the mind not reasoning. It is a total cessation of the soul's operations with only one exception of love, which she attributes to the will. She was left with a spiritual understanding unlike any secular knowledge of the world, and a conviction of God's presence unlike anything the earthly can proffer.

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[67] Louis K. Dupré and James A. Wiseman, *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 170, Adobe PDF eBook. Dupré (1925–2022) was a Catholic phenomenologist and religious philosopher, and had served as the T. Lawrason Riggs Professor in Yale University's religious studies department. Wiseman (1942–) is a theologian and Benedictine monk and professor at Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

[68] Teresa of Avila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila by Herself*, 7. Emphasis added.

*The Intellectual Vision*

At age 41 (1556), Teresa encountered her first "rapture," which she records in her autobiography (*Life* 27.2):[69]

> One day when I was at prayer … I saw Christ at my side – or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body or the *eyes of the soul*. He seemed quite close to me, and I saw that it was He. As I thought, He was speaking to me. Being completely ignorant that such visions were possible, I was very much afraid at first … though as soon as He spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear. All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be at my side, but as this was *not an imaginary vision* I could not see in what form.[70] But I *most clearly felt* that He was all the time on my right, and was a witness of everything that I was doing. Each time I became a little recollected, or was not entirely distracted, I could not but be aware that He was beside me (emphasis added).

In this vision, Teresa's spiritual eyes were opened. Since she did not see Jesus with physical eyes, nor with "eyes of the soul," and since she specifically emphasizes that it "was not an imaginary vision," we can infer that it is most likely a vision of the "intellectual" variant, according to the classification of Evelyn Underhill (c.f. Appendix B). It is likely a vision that the Lord impresses upon the Inner Person of the saint. Because this vision is so supranormal, so beyond her past experiences, it stirred up her fear, even though it was her beloved Lord Incarnate that she sensed. His commanding presence was so intense that she could "mostly clearly" feel Him on her side. This use of the superlative may not be an exaggeration on her part, as Underhill observes what contemplatives often express without vacillation, "since this [vision] is directly representative of truth, and initiates the visionary into the atmosphere of the Eternal, it may well claim precedence over that prosaic and perpetual vision which we call the 'real world.'"[71]

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[69] Teresa of Avila, 7.

[70] For a brief taxonomy of the type of visions usually referenced by mystical writers, see Appendix B.

[71] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: E P Dutton, 1911), 344. Underhill (1875–1941) was a Catholic religious writer on spiritual practices and

For Teresa, this assurance of the supernatural knowledge, or "favor of the Lord," which is more trustworthy than natural eyesight, seems to have been doubted by others, as she addresses such a concern: "if I say that I do not see Him with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul, because this is no imaginary vision, how then can I know and affirm that he is beside me with greater certainty than if I saw Him?" Immediately, she lays bear her experiential defense: "He appears to the soul by a knowledge brighter than the sun. … there is a light which, though unseen, illumines the understanding so that the soul may enjoy this great blessing, which brings very great blessings with it" (*Life*, 27.3). Shortly afterwards, she emphatically states again this certainty:

> Though He is unseen, He imprints so clear a knowledge on the soul that there seems to be no possibility of doubt. The Lord is pleased to engrave it so deeply on the understanding that one can no more doubt it than one can doubt the evidence of one's eyes. In fact it is easier to doubt one's eyes. For sometimes we wonder whether we have not imagined something seen, whereas here, though that suspicion may arise momentarily, so great a certainty remains behind that the doubt has no validity (*Life*, 27.5).

There is also a distinction between this intellectual vision and "the presence of God," as experienced often by the practitioners of "the prayer of union" or "the prayer of quiet." For this latter encounter, she says, "It is as if when we are on the point of praying we discover the Person to whom we were going to speak. We seem to know that He is listening by the spiritual effects, by the feelings of great love and faith … also by the good resolutions … that we then make. This great favour comes from God … But it is not a vision." In this case, the presence of God is felt and leaves behind certain indelible effects in the soul. "But in a vision the soul distinctly sees that Jesus Christ, the Virgin's son, is present" (*Life*, 27.4). If her experience was not a vision seen with the "eyes of the soul," and not even any type of imagery associated with natural senses,

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Christian mysticism. She was mostly self-taught, but received an honorary Doctorate of Divinity by Aberdeen University and became a fellow of King's College in London.

could we conclude that it happened in the deepest part of her spirit, the Inner Person? Could it be that the Lord enabled her to go through such miraculous event so that she may "be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16), especially amidst her sufferings?

## *The Interior Castle*

Teresa's spiritual pilgrimage ends with the phase of experiencing the Trinitarian mystery, which empowers her to write about the very finely compartmentalized spiritual anthropology in her magnum opus, the *Interior Castle*. We may liken her enlightenment at this stage to a full and unimpeded discovery of her Inner Person ("an area reserved for communion," "further inner depth," "the profundity of the area"), which exists in her innermost depth in mutual indwelling with the Triune God, as intimated by Kavanaugh in his introduction to his translation of this work:

> Deep within her spirit she perceived **an area reserved for communion** with the persons of the Blessed Trinity. In 1571, after she had expounded much of her doctrine on prayer in both the *Life* and the *Way of Perfection*, yet **a further inner depth** was revealed; and Teresa insists repeatedly on **the profundity of the area** in which her experience now takes place. Here was shown to her, in the fullness of light through an intellectual vision, the presence of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. … she did enjoy habitually the company of these three Persons. … Shortly afterward she experienced, on the other hand, that she herself was dwelling in God.[72]

In reading this book, the first prominent feature is probably the use of plural nouns to describe the mansions, or dwelling places, of the seven stages. This usage insinuates her understanding of the complexity of the human interior world, and perhaps also indicates her humbleness in acknowledging the myriads of possibilities which might exist outside of her knowledge. "I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its

[72] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 7–8. Emphasis added.

marvelous capacity." And this is the reason she sets the theme of the book as the title indicates, "we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places" (*IC*, I, 1.1). Kavanaugh divides the seven mansions into two groups: "The first three groups of dwelling places speak of what is achievable through human efforts and the ordinary help of grace. The remaining four groups deal with the passive, or mystical, elements of the spiritual life."[73] As for the intended audience, from the outset, she states that this is written "for her Sisters and daughters, the Discalced Carmelite nuns" (Prologue). The following is a very brief summary of these stages.

### *The First Mansions*

In this first section of the book, Teresa lays out the foundations for her construction of this inner castle. She first describes the castle, which represents our soul, as "made entirely out of a diamond or very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places." She traces the origin of this "sublime dignity and beauty" to its Maker, who made it in His very own image (*IC*, I, 1.1). Further, she clarifies what is meant by "many rooms" – "you should think not in terms of just a few rooms but in terms of a million" ((*IC*, I, 2.12). From this we get some sense of the inestimable immensity of the interior world as seen by the saint. These rooms are everywhere in all dimensions of the castle: "some up above, others down below, others to the sides; and in the center and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place" (*IC*, I, 1.3). And thus, she advises the beginner:

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[73] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 19.

> The things of the soul must always be considered as plentiful, spacious, and large; to do so is not an exaggeration. The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine, and the sun that is in this royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner. Let it walk through these dwelling places which are up above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such great dignity (*IC*, I, 2.8).

Her heart-felt praise for this center of the castle gives hints of the Inner Person, situated in our spirit that can be compared to a castle as the very central dwelling place inside our soul, made by the Creator from the incipiency of human history for divine-human communication. On the other hand, the true worth of the soul is often neglected: "through our own fault we don't understand ourselves or know who we are," because we live an outward life according to our natural innate (fallen) desires and senses: "we know we have souls. But we seldom consider the precious things that can be found in this soul, or *who dwells within it*, or its high value. Consequently, little effort is made to preserve its beauty. All our attention is taken up with the plainness of the diamond's setting or the *outer wall* of the castle; that is, with these *bodies* of ours" (*IC*, I, 1.2, emphasis added). What is she intimating by asking, "who dwells within" our soul? Is there an actual substantial entity existing there that we have been ignorant about?

Teresa also realizes the shortcomings of this building type of allegory – that since we possess this castle within ourselves, there seems to be no need to enter it. She defends her construct as not a stupidity, but a necessity, that one must enter within the soul's castle to find whatever precious within:

> How foolish it would seem were we to tell someone to enter a room he is already in. But you must understand that there is a great difference in the ways one may be inside the castle. For there are many souls who are in the outer courtyard … and don't care at all about entering the castle, nor do they know what lies within that most precious place, nor who is within, nor even how many rooms it has. You

> have already heard in some books on prayer that the soul is advised to enter within itself; well that's the very thing I'm advising (IC, I, 1.5).[74]

Then she laments those who are ignorant of this internal treasure, equating them to "souls so ill and so accustomed to being involved in external matters that there is no remedy, nor does it seem they can *enter within themselves*." Because they are mindful only of "the insects and vermin that are in the wall surrounding the castle," they have effectively become almost like those critters (IC, I, 1.6, emphasis added). Note especially the phrase *enter within themselves*, which denotes a special act of turning inward that should not be unfamiliar to the mystically minded. On a positive note, she is also quick to point out the way of entry to this castle – prayer and reflection. At this entry stage, those who are destined to enter and who likely only attend to this matter casually and momentarily, eventually do enter the first set of rooms. These rooms, nevertheless, are not fortresses against all evils, because "so many reptiles get in with them that they are prevented from seeing the beauty of the castle and from calming down" (*IC*, I, 1.7-8). This beauty in the midst of the castle is also allegorized as "the fount, the shining sun," ready to impart light to the thirsty soul, should the black veil be removed from her (*IC*, I, 2.3).

One particularly important dwelling place in the first stage is the room of self-knowledge, which is rudimentary, yet essential "even for those whom the Lord has brought into the very dwelling place where He abides," and that is because "here [the soul] will discover its lowliness better than by thinking of itself, and be freer from the vermin that enter the first rooms" (*IC*, I, 2.8). Knowing one's lowliness is crucial because it engenders humility. Teresa tells her beloved nuns that "I wouldn't want any relaxation ever in this regard, however high you may have climbed into the heavens. While we are on this earth nothing is more important to us than

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[74] One of the books perhaps refers to *The Third Alphabet* (1537) by Francisco de Osuna, a Franciscan, which helps her greatly in the "prayer of recollection," during a period of two decades, when she desperately searched for a confessor. (*Life*, 4.6)

humility. So I repeat that it is good, indeed very good, to try to enter first into the room where selfknowledge is dealt with" (*IC*, I, 2.9).

Teresa warns that each dwelling place, at least at this stage, is inundated with "legions of devils to fight souls off … since in the first rooms souls are still absorbed in the world and engulfed in their pleasures and vanities, with their honors and pretenses, their vassals (which are these senses and faculties) don't have the strength God gave human nature in the beginning. And these souls are easily conquered." The advice she gives is to approach God in prayer as frequently as one possibly can (*IC*, I, 2.12).

### *The Second Mansions*

Teresa's definition of prayer sets a high standard: practitioners in this stage "have already begun to practice prayer" and knows they need to progress further from the first mansions, but are still lacking the will power to be steadfast without regression, all because "they don't avoid the occasions of sin," which puts them in a perilous situation. However, they are granted much mercy to try to shun the venomous reptiles. At this level, the perils are not as numerous as the first, yet here much more exertion is required due to the recognition of the dangers. Therefore, "there is great hope they will enter further into the castle." Another danger lies in not promptly responding to God's calling: "Yet this Lord desires intensely that we love Him and seek His company, so much so that from time to time He calls us to draw near Him. And His voice is so sweet the poor soul dissolves at not doing immediately what He commands. Thus … hearing His voice is a greater trial than not hearing it" (*IC*, II, 1.2).

Teresa encourages the nuns to keep up their persistent effort: "Sisters, don't underestimate this first favor, nor should you become disconsolate if you don't respond at once to the Lord. His

Majesty … sees perseverance and good desires. This perseverance is most necessary here." She exposes further the attacks coming from the darkness "in a thousand ways" to assault the soul, worse than the first stage because there "the soul was deaf and dumb – at least it heard very little and resisted less," but now the intellect and other faculties are more active and sharp. The devils would try to deceive the soul into the belief that worldliness (secular objects and pleasures) almost seems "eternal." Worldly honor, friends and relatives, and health are just some of the multitude of obstacles that they distract the soul of (*IC*, II, 1.3).

Kavanaugh sums up the pilgrims at the second mansions as "more receptive to the promptings and invitations of Christ's grace," and "the struggle with the forces of evil is now more keenly felt."[75] But Teresa wisely and sternly warns against seeking spiritual enjoyment at this stage of imperfection and loose foundation: "it's so important that I repeat it here: … souls shouldn't be thinking about consolations at this beginning stage. It would be a very poor way to start building so precious and great an edifice. If the foundation is on sand, the whole building will fall to the ground. … These are not the dwelling places where it rains manna; those lie further ahead." Instead, she advises the sisters not "to complain about dryness," but to "embrace the cross your Spouse has carried and understand that this must be your task. Let the one who can do so suffer more for Him, and she will be rewarded that much more" (*IC*, II, 1.7). A key word for the second stage of mansions would be *perseverance*.

### *The Third Mansions*

Those who enter the third stage are characterized by, inter alia, such a fear of grieving the Holy Spirit that they are careful not to commit even venial (minor, as opposed to "mortal") sins

[75] Kavanaugh, introduction to *The Interior Castle*, 22.

which would not incur eternal condemnation. They have the proclivity for penance, and do find time for recollection. Time- and speech-management are tasks that they perform well, and they pour out their love toward others. Those with a family also exhibit good governance of the household. For these with such well-maintained life, Teresa finds "no reason why entrance even into the final dwelling place should be denied … nor will the Lord deny them this entrance if they desire it; for such a desire is an excellent way to prepare oneself so that every favor may be granted" (*IC*, III, 1.5).

Even so, in order to "possess the Lord completely," just the desire alone is not enough. Citing the example of the young man inquiring about eternal life from Jesus, Teresa warns that "ordinarily the great dryness in prayer comes from this [desire to be perfect], although it also has other causes." There is also a possibility of "some interior trials that many good souls undergo (unbearable trials and not at all due to their own fault), from which the Lord always frees them to their own great benefit." Inasmuch as they who are in the third mansions have put such great efforts to straighten out their lives for the sake of holiness, Teresa informs us, "they cannot accept patiently that the door of entry to the place where our King dwells be closed to them who consider themselves His vassals." She encourages the nuns to press on, because there is still much to work on; and humbleness is still the key:

> Enter, enter, my daughters, into the interior rooms; pass on from your little works. By the mere fact that you are Christians you must do all these things and much more. It is enough for you to be God's vassals; don't let your desire be for so much that as a result you will be left with nothing. Behold the saints who entered this King's chamber, and you will see the difference between them and us. Don't ask for what you have not deserved, nor should it enter our minds that we have merited this favor however much we may have served – we who have offended God (IC, III, 1.6).

Thus, the saint cries out immediately: "O humility, humility! … I cannot help but think that anyone who makes such an issue of this dryness is a little lacking in humility." The progress

one makes so far should not be the ground for contentment and pride, but rather, "Let us prove ourselves, … or let the Lord prove us, for He knows well how to do this even though we often don't want to understand it. … we have no reason for complaining of His Majesty." She points out that God's standard of measurement in awarding His favors is the love we have toward Him. "And this love … must not be fabricated in our imaginations but proved by deeds. And don't think He needs our works; He needs the determination of our wills" (*IC*, III, 1.7). At this stage, Teresa reminds the reader to be even more humble, neither expecting nor deeming oneself to be worthy of rewards.

### *The Fourth Mansions*

From here on, Teresa tells us, it is no longer our human, natural realm that is concerned, but "supernatural experiences begin here." As such, it is most enigmatic and hard to describe, even for a spiritual veteran like her. Thus, she humbly commits herself to divine guidance: "In order to begin to speak of the fourth dwelling places I really need to entrust myself, as I've already done, to the Holy Spirit and beg Him to speak for me from here on that I may say something about the remaining rooms in a way that you will understand" (*IC*, IV, 1.1).

The first thing that sets apart these supernatural dwelling places would be their beauty, simply by virtue of their proximity to the center, the royal palace of the King. Here, things to be seen and comprehended are "so delicate that the intellect is incapable of devising a way to explain them." The blessing of reaching this stage may or may not require arduous practices of the previous stages, because it all lies with God's sovereignty and mercy: "For the Lord gives when He desires, as He desires, and to whom He desires. Since these blessings belong to Him, He does no injustice to anyone." Here, the pernicious insects of the devil is no longer effectual,

since they could not injure the soul at this juncture, but "rather, they are the occasion of gain." For this reason they rarely appear at this stage (*IC*, IV, 1.2-3).

To advance further to higher levels, she asserts, "the important thing is not to think much but to love much; and so do that which best stirs you to love." Then she explains what love consists in: not "great delight," but "desiring with strong determination to please God in everything, in striving, insofar as possible, not to offend Him, and in asking Him for the advancement of the honor and glory of His Son and the increase of the Catholic Church. These are the signs of love" (*IC*, IV, 1.7).

Furthermore, Teresa also made an analysis of the soul, according to her own experience. She claims that the mind or imagination does not equal the intellect, the latter being a faculty of the soul. She relates how she was much bothered by a disquiet mind that usually "flies about quickly," which only can be contained by God. But in her opinion, often "the faculties of my soul were occupied and recollected in God while my mind on the other hand was distracted" (*IC*, IV, 1.8). She proceeds to compare the movement of the mind to the swift motion of the unstoppable heavens. As such we are deceived into the notion that the soul, with all its faculties, also wanders away with the restlessness of the mind, and so the time spent with God is ineffective or even wasteful. But, she consoles us, "the soul is perhaps completely joined with Him in the dwelling places very close to the center while the mind is on the outskirts of the castle suffering from a thousand wild and poisonous beasts, and meriting by this suffering. As a result we should not be disturbed; nor should we abandon prayer, which is what the devil wants us to do." As a side note, it seems that what she here describes as the "mind" is frequently categorized as part of the soul, and her description of the "soul" with its faculties, including the intellect, often referred to as the spirit, according to the contemporary trichotomy. In any case, she reminds us again the

importance of self-knowledge (at First Mansions): "For the most part all the trials and disturbances come from our not understanding ourselves (*IC*, IV, 1.9).

### *The Fifth Mansions*

This is the place where the saint, or rather, God, demands that those entering must surrender all to Him: "Whether you have little or much, He wants everything for Himself; and in conformity with what you know you have given you will receive greater or lesser favors. There is no better proof for recognizing whether our prayer has reached union or not." Here she also introduces a special state of the soul, when it is in the divine-human union, comparable to death, or a total loss of the functions of the soul, not in a painful way, but joyfully, since it is immersed the presence of God. She specifically denies that it is a "dreamy state" (*IC*, V, 1.3-4) – thus refuting many modern psychological interpretations of her raptures as dreams or hallucinations.

> It seems that the soul is as though asleep; yet neither does it really think it is asleep nor does it feel awake. … all the faculties are asleep in this state – and truly asleep – to the things of the world and to ourselves. … during the time that the union lasts the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it doesn't understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God. Thus the death is a delightful one, an uprooting from the soul of all the operations the latter can have while being in the body. The death is a delightful one because in truth it seems that in order to dwell more perfectly in God the soul is so separated from the body that I don't even know if it has life enough to breathe (*IC*, V, 1.3).

In these mansions of the fifth stage, no longer is there any room for the bothersome "little lizards" of the devil, "however slender they may be … for there is neither imagination, nor memory, nor intellect that can impede this good. And … if the prayer is truly union with God the devil cannot even enter or do any damage. His Majesty is so joined and united with *the essence of the soul* that the devil will not dare approach, nor will he even know about this secret." Here

only God can assert His influence on the soul, and "not even ourselves" can impede His work of grace (*IC*, V, 1.4). So extraordinary and supra-natural is this union that she describes it as "above all earthly joys, above all delights, above all consolations, and still more than that" (*IC*, V, 1.5). As for the self-doubt that exists in previous dwelling places (*IC*, V, 1.4), the soul is no longer entangled by it, since "God so places Himself in *the interior of that soul* that when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that it was in God and God was in it." And this memory could remain with the soul for a long time, even if the experience is not repeated for many years. The assurance of the mutual indwelling between the soul and God is permanent and unshakable, "not because of a vision but because of a *certitude* remaining in the soul that only God can place there" (*IC*, V, 1.8-9, emphasis added). In these quotes, "the essence of the soul," "the interior of the soul," and the long lasting "certitude" are where the union with and indwelling of God occurs; they indicate an element or location that is deeper than the soul, per se, and could possibly refer to the Biblical Inner Person. A confirmation for this connection would be that in this divine-human union, all the soul's "faculties are asleep in this state – and truly asleep – to the things of the world and to ourselves," quoted above.

In such sacred work of God, Teresa reminds us, it is critical that the soul remains motionless to fully observe the divine wonders, as the psalmist says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10a). "He doesn't want our will to have any part to play, for it has been entirely surrendered to Him. Neither does He want the door of the faculties and of the senses to be opened, for they are all asleep. But He wants to enter the center of the soul without going through any door" (*IC*, V, 1.11). Such is the miraculous, mysterious ways of God.

This fifth stage, where the soul genuinely dies to the world, is when the transformation of the soul becomes almost unrecognizable, even by itself. Teresa compares this change of the soul

to the metamorphosis of the silk worm into a butterfly. A great moral change in the will has occurred which renders the soul utterly devoted to God:

> When the soul is, in this prayer, truly dead to the world, a little white butterfly comes forth. … How transformed the soul is when it comes out of this prayer after having been placed within the greatness of God and so closely joined with Him for a little while [she observes that the experience never lasts for more than half an hour]. Truly, I tell you that the soul doesn't recognize itself. Look at the difference there is between an ugly worm and a little white butterfly; that's what the difference is here. The soul doesn't know how it could have merited so much good … It sees within itself a desire to praise the Lord; it would want to dissolve and die a thousand deaths for Him. It soon begins to experience a desire to suffer great trials without its being able to do otherwise. There are the strongest desires for penance, for solitude, and that all might know God; and great pain comes to it when it sees that He is offended (*IC*, V, 2.7).

The transformation of the soul is so thorough, that it loses all attachments to worldly objects and people. Instead, it values spiritual tranquility in God. "Everything wearies it, for it has learned through experience that creatures cannot give it true rest" (*IC*, V, 2.8). "It feels estranged from earthly things" (*IC*, V, 2.9). This feeling of "isolation" from the world is precisely the work of God in order that the soul may realize its status as belonging no longer to the world, but solely to God (*IC*, V, 2.13). As the apostle Paul says, what once was a servant to sin and the world is now a servant to righteousness and God! (Romans 6:16-22). And since the soul's ownership has changed, a natural and precious consequence is that the will is now unequivocally aligned with God. Teresa calls it the "union with God's will," which imparts true happiness and tranquility to the soul, both in the present and in eternity (*IC*, V, 3.3).

Uniting with God's will, per se, will not diminish one's sufferings; what it will do, however, is to prevent them from causing restlessness in the soul. For this reason, from this stage on, the depth of the soul is shielded from the anguish which can be aroused by afflictions in the previous states. The senses and faculties are still affected by sufferings, but no further, because they are suspended when one reaches the fifth mansions (*IC*, V, 3.4). In our perspective, it is as

though the Inner Person from this juncture forward has become impervious to outward assaults, similar to what the apostle Paul's prayer describes: that the Inner Person of the believers be strengthened by the Holy Spirit with might (Ephesians 3:16). The outward person can withstand the devil's ruthless attacks because the Inner Person is immovable as a fortress guarded by angelic hosts!

To arrive at this stage is no effortless trifle, since great price must be paid, which mainly consists in one's own self. Our saint mourns the fact that few would attain the full union with God's will, however hard they try to not grieve the Holy Spirit and live a pious life. What remain to be dealt with are subtle and imperceptible areas: love and esteem of the self, passing judgment on others (however insignificant the things may be), and failing to love others as oneself. This higher bar is difficult to reach since it is beyond just moral obligation and the avoidance of sins. But, "we don't advance very far in what is required for complete union with the will of God" (*IC*, V, 3.6). God's will for us is nothing short of perfection, and "complete perfection" (*IC*, V, 3.7), as Jesus sums up in the conclusion of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:48). Practically, our religious duty, according to Teresa, who paraphrase Jesus' answer to "the great commandment in the Law" (Matthew 22:36-40), condenses to just two requirements: to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself. We fall far short in these two aspects of love "for so great a God as we ought!" (*IC*, V, 3.7). Of these two commandments, the latter, or love for the neighbor, especially serves as the indicator of the former, because it is difficult for us to judge our love toward God, but easy to know the extend of our love of the neighbor (*IC*, V, 3.8).

Here Teresa introduces the concept of spiritual marriage, saying that the joys derived from it far surpasses those from the mundane counterpart: "it is all a matter of love united with love, and the actions of love are most pure and so extremely delicate and gentle that there is no

way of explaining them" (*IC*, V, 4.3). Nevertheless, she does not equate the prayer of union at the fifth mansions to this marriage, not even to betrothal. What happens in the brief moment of the union is that the soul is enabled to secretly view her future Husband, and is being made more and more worthy for their eventual holy matrimony. The soul at this stage is deeply in love and strives not to lose this state which will lead to the betrothal. Her warning is that if the soul's affection should stray to other things or persons, the cost is dear: "it loses everything. And the loss is as great as the favors He was granting her, and cannot be exaggerated" (*IC*, V, 4.4). Therefore, those who enter into this stage need to "not grow careless but withdraw from [worldly] occasions." Before the betrothal occurs at the upcoming stage, the devil still can cunningly deceive the soul and prevent it from advancing.

### *The Sixth Mansions*

At this stage, the soul has obtained "that token or pledge of betrothal," but Teresa now makes it a priority to address the trials first, which comes at this stage before the betrothal, when the soul has a firm conviction for the future Spouse, and for no one else. However great that desire is, the Spouse does not consider it sufficient, but "He still wants it to desire this more, and He wants the betrothal to take place at a cost; it is the greatest of blessings." This cost entails severe trials, both interior and exterior (*IC*, VI, 1.1). Their severity is so great that if the soul knew in advance, its determination could be undermined. This way of affliction may not come upon all souls, but she has great doubts that people who truly benefit from heavenly things could live an earthly life without any form of trials (*IC*, VI, 1.2).

Teresa then lists the various types of trials: friends turning hostile (*IC*, VI, 1.3); praise, especial public praise, which is a greater trial than harsh denigration – "blame does not

intimidate the soul but strengthens it," and the soul would gain "a special and very tender love for its persecutors" (*IC*, VI, 1.4-5); and severest illnesses with severe pain – the worst kind of exterior trial (*IC*, VI, 1.6). Besides these external trials, there are also the interior kind: having an inexperienced and suspicious confessor who doubts one's unusual experiences (*IC*, VI, 1.8); the feeling of incapability in explaining anything that happens in one's spiritual encounter – the darkening of the understanding so serious that the soul cannot see the truth and can only rely on the imagination, which is subject to the manipulation of the devil; and then, also the false belief caused by the devil about God's rejection (*IC*, VI, 1.9). And the remedy? None, but patiently waiting for divine mercy to arrive:

> For at an unexpected time, with one word alone or a chance happening, He so quickly calms the storm that it seems there had not been even as much as a cloud in that soul, and it remains filled with sunlight and much more consolation. And like one who has escaped from a dangerous battle and been victorious, it comes out praising our Lord; for it was He who fought for the victory (*IC*, VI, 1.10).

Next, she analyzes "locutions" that are often heard by the person engaged in prayer. They can have three distinct sources: God, the devil, or the soul itself. She lists the signs that they are from God: (1) their power and authority – "for locutions from God effect what they say" (*IC*, VI, 2.5). (2) The resulting tranquility in the soul, "the devout and peaceful recollection," and the desire to praise God (*IC*, VI, 2.6). (3) The duration of the words in the memory is very long, or even throughout life. The certainty in the soul is so strong as to override any intellectual doubts (*IC*, VI, 2.7). Lacking these signs, the locutions most likely come from either the imagination or the devil (*IC*, VI, 2.10-11).

However, there is a higher, more interior way for God to communicate to the soul directly, and that is via the intellectual vision, or via our proposed Inner Person as a deeper entity within the soul. It produces the most steadfast assurance to the soul that the words are divinely sourced, and never from the evil one:

> The locution takes place in such intimate depths and a person with the ears of the soul seems to hear those words from the Lord Himself so clearly and so in secret that this very way in which they are heard, together with the acts that the vision itself produces, assures that person and gives him certitude that the devil can have no part to play in the locution. Wonderful effects are left so that the soul may believe (*IC*, VI, 2.12).

With vigilance, the soul would obtain its confidence for the reasons that (1) there is an increased clarity, such that the memory retains even "every syllable" and the style of speech; (2) the locutions happen unexpectedly, when the person is not thinking about spiritual matters; (3) it is like a direct hearing without involving the person's preferential composition in the imagination; (4) it is marked by very distinct words, each rendering much comprehension, surpassing the capability of human intellection; and (5) rich meanings are imparted to be understood, "together with the words, … much more … than is ever dreamed of without words" (*IC*, VI, 2.12-16).

At this point, Teresa goes back to discuss the reason for the sufferings imposed on the soul. It is God's way of multiplying its desire to treasure its future Spouse. An important aspect of the work is to engender in the soul the courage to proceed with the betrothal with such a majestic Lord. Our natural person is so "very timid and lowly" that in a matter as great as uniting with such a heavenly King, the soul is quite incapable to receive the honor. To consummate this betrothal, He raptures the soul and "draws it out of its senses." Without this loss of the natural senses, seeing such lofty majesty, it would possibly die (*IC*, VI, 4.1-2). Teresa's explanation here elucidates the fact that the natural person cannot see God face to face (cf. Exodus 33:20). But, since God desires to live with (or in) mankind, He placed a spirit inside the deepest part of the human soul, which is of the same essence with His Spirit so as to facilitate communion. Teresa's observation confirms to us that when the soul meets with God "intellectually" or "spiritually," it is in a state of consciousness which is not connected with any human natural senses. In other words and in our parlance, it is the human spirit, or the Inner Person, that is active in this divine-

human encounter. And such encounter is out of the reach of the ordinary natural functions/senses of the human soul.

This meeting between the Creator and the created should take place so seclusively that the demand is laid upon the soul to close the doors not just of the dwelling places, but even of the castle and its walls. "For in desiring to carry off this soul, He takes away the breath so that, even though the other senses sometimes last a little longer, a person cannot speak at all; although at other times everything is taken away at once, and the hands and the body grow cold so that the person doesn't seem to have any life; nor sometimes is it known whether he is breathing" (*IC*, VI, 4.13). The saint often uses a third-person perspective to talk about her near-death experience, not caused by physical trauma, but by God's deep work during the divine-human meeting to effect a "death" in the soul, which in turn produces certain unusual physical phenomena.

> I saw a person in this condition; truly she thought she was dying, and this was not so surprising because certainly there is great danger of death. And thus, even though the experience lasts a short while, it leaves the body very disjointed, and during that time the heart beat is as slow as it would be if a person were about to render his soul to God. This is no exaggeration, for the natural heat fails, and the fire so burns the soul that with a little more intensity God would have fulfilled the soul's desires (IC, VI, 11.4).

The "death" of the soul is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching that "He that loveth his life (ψυχὴν, soul) shall lose it; and he that hateth his life (ψυχὴν, soul) in this world shall keep it unto life (ζωὴν, life) eternal" (John. 12:25). Notice how Jesus distinguishes what one must lose (ψυχὴν, soul) in order to gain (ζωὴν, life), which are undifferentiated in the KJV and most other English translations. This difference is correctly observed and pointed out by Watkins: "There is in all human nature a principle which would seek as the highest good the *life of the body and of the soul*, as distinct from the higher *life of the spirit*, and would shrink from sacrifice and death; but the true principle of life is of the spirit, and only in the sacrifice of the desires of the lower

physical and emotional life is that spiritual life realised."[76] In the same vein, Jesus also told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John. 3:3b). Because of the effects of the Adamic fall on the soul, it no longer functions as a beneficial or benign organ, but as an impediment to one's union with God, thus the necessity of a rebirth in the spirit. Being reborn logically implies the death of the former, old self (the life dominated by the fallen soul), and the beginning of a new self, which is reigned by the awakened and constantly renewed Inner Person, as the apostle Paul indicated.

### *The Seventh Mansions*

After the Lord completes His betrothal with the desiring soul in the sixth mansions, having subjected it to many trials, both exterior and interior, the final stage of the spiritual marriage is set in motion. Prior to the matrimony, He brings the soul into the קֹדֶשׁ הַקָּדָשִׁים (*kodesh ha-kodashim*, the Holy of Holies, cf. Exodus 26:33, 1 Kings 6:16, Hebrews 9:3), His own dwelling place, or the seventh mansions.[77] "For just as in heaven so in the soul His Majesty must have a room where He dwells alone. Let us call it another heaven" (*IC*, VII, 1.3). This analogy of "another heaven," as "a room" reserved exclusively for God, is similar to Augustine's "heaven of heaven" exegesis of Genesis, and gives us a strong hint of the Pauline Inner Person. This room, where God alone dwells, is the fulfillment of His purpose in the creation of mankind. And His

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[76] Henry William Watkins, "The Gospel According to St. John," in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible: A Verse by Verse Explanation*, ed. Charles John Ellicott, vol. 6, *The Four Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 491. Emphasis added. Watkins (1844–1922) was Professor of Logic and Moral Philosophy at King's College London, and then Professor of Hebrew at Durham University in UK.

[77] "… also called Devir, the innermost and most sacred area of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem, accessible only to the Israelite high priest. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, he was permitted to enter the square, windowless enclosure to burn incense and sprinkle sacrificial animal blood. By this act, the most solemn of the religious year, the high priest atoned for his own sins and those of the priesthood." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Holy of Holies," accessed December 8, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20211104170530/https://www.britannica.com/topic/Holy-of-Holies.

Son, Jesus Christ, is properly called, Emmanuel (cf. Matthew 1:23), a transliteration of the Hebrew, עִמָּנוּאֵל, meaning "with us (is) God," because as Redeemer for mankind, the Eternal Son is incarnated as a man to die for the sins of the entire human race, and to rise again glorified, ushering in the Holy Spirit to dwell inside the believers.[78] Here Teresa tells us that this seventh mansion is precisely the location inside the soul where God as the Holy Spirit makes His abode with mankind. This could very well be what the apostle Paul calls, the Inner Person, which "delights in the law of God" (Romans 7:22), which is still continually receiving divine transformation so that it "is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16), and being "strengthened with might by His Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16).

By design, this entrance into the seventh dwelling places is a special privilege that God grants the few souls who passed the previous six stages, and is quite different from the raptures and unions earlier experienced (*IC*, VII, 1.5). Here, the intellectual vision is conferred upon the soul to allow it to see and communicate with the three Persons of the Trinity

> In this seventh dwelling place the union comes about in a different way: Our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes … the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it … First there comes an enkindling in the spirit in the manner of a cloud of magnificent splendor; and these Persons are distinct, and through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone. It knows in such a way that what we hold by faith, it understands, we can say, through sight – although the sight is not with the bodily eyes nor with the eyes of the soul, because we are not dealing with an imaginative vision. Here all three Persons communicate themselves to it, speak to it, and explain those words of the Lord in the Gospel: that He and the Father and the Holy Spirit will come to dwell with the soul that loves Him and keeps His commandments (*IC*, VII, 1.6).

What the saint describes here is a new dimension of comprehension, and from the repeated insistence that "the sight is not with the bodily eyes nor with the eyes of the soul," we

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[78] Jonathan K. Mickelson, *Mickelson's Enhanced* Strong's Dictionaries of the Greek and Hebrew Testaments, theWord ed. (Kennesaw, GA: LivingSon Press, 2015), s.v. "H6005, עִמָּנוּאֵל".

could possibly infer that such knowledge occurs within the Inner Person. From this point on, she enters the reality of what the apostle Paul mentions as "renewed day by day," and "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18a), both only possible for earthlings if they are brought into the spiritual realm such as her "intellectual vision." This vision is no longer a momentary instance of the rapture of the soul, because the Triune God becomes an incessant presence within the spirit and the vision becomes a constant beholding, a permanent in-sight, so deep that it is beyond human words (*IC*, VII, 1.7). Just like Paul teaches, it was a ceaseless renewal and prayer every day and every moment because "the soul will be truly helped in every way to advance in perfection." Regardless of the external afflictions and daily chores required of her, the spirit, or "the essential part of her soul," remains steadfast within the secret room with God. "it was there always enjoying that quietude at its own pleasure" (*IC*, VII, 1.0) Furthermore, She carefully explains the subtle distinctions of this decipherable soul-spirit division:

> Interior things are seen in such a way that one understands with certitude that there is some kind of difference, *a difference clearly recognized*, between the soul and the spirit, even though *they are both one*. So delicate a division is perceived that sometimes it seems the one functions differently from the other, and so does the savor the Lord desires to give them seem different. It also seems to me that the soul and the faculties are not one but different (*IC*, VII, 1.11, emphasis added).

The soul and the spirit within are distinctive, yet she also stresses that they are one, making them, together with the physical body. inseverable parts of the holistic humanity.

The lofty purpose of the constant divine presence within the spirit is to continually perfect the spiritual marriage to its fullness, which perfection, according to Teresa, we never reach in this life. And so, it is our duty never to retreat from this blessing. Initially, in Teresa's case, this stage began with an imaginative vision of the Incarnate Son, "in the form of shining splendor, beauty, and majesty" of the resurrected Lord. The message that was communicated to

her was that of a nuptial union: what belongs to the Groom also belongs to the bride, and reciprocally, her affairs now will be taken care of by Him (*IC*, VII, 2.1). Because of the power, the words, and the peculiarity of this vision, even the spiritually experienced saint was "stupefied and frightened. … You must understand that there is the greatest difference between all the previous visions and those of this dwelling place. Between the spiritual betrothal and the spiritual marriage the difference is as great as that which exists between two who are betrothed and between two who can no longer be separated" (*IC*, VII, 2.2).

The spiritual state of intellectual vision is also marked by the failing of awareness of human corporeality, as though "the soul were not in [the body], but one's thought is only of the spirit." Teresa compares the sudden entrance of the Lord inside this room to the risen Jesus' miraculous corporeal appearance to His disciples in the room with all doors shut (cf. John 20:19-21). The divine communication to the soul in a flash of time "is a secret so great and a favor so sublime – and the delight the soul experiences so extreme – that" it is beyond words; and she can only depict the experience as that God desires to reveal to the soul "in a more sublime manner than through any spiritual vision or taste, the glory of heaven. … He has wished to show His love for us by giving some persons understanding of the point to which this love reaches so that we might praise His grandeur." And this again goes back to the original purpose of God's creation of mankind – to indwell in their spirits forever, without separation ever. Unlike the spiritual betrothal of the previous stage, where the awareness of the soul of God's presence is ephemeral, here "the soul always remains with its God in that center." It is comparable to rain falling from the sky, only to be absorbed by the ocean and never divided again (*IC*, VII, 2.3-4).

## Concluding Remarks on Teresa of Avila

Through her biography and detailed depiction of the human interiority, Teresa of Avila contributes inestimably to the later generation's spirituality, in addition to adding our understanding of the human spiritual anthropology. She not only informs us of the almost limitless vastness of our very own inward cosmos, but also leaves a trace to show us how she is able, or enabled, to attain to that very intimate, innermost "dwelling place" where God and humanity unite in, literally, "the most holy matrimony." From her narratives, it is not strenuous at all to connect her divine participation with those of the apostle Paul: being translated to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), and being renewed and strengthened in the Inner Person day by day, amidst outward persecution and decay. She indeed is a gift from God to humanity, and one of the brightest light in the history of Christian spirituality. For her, the innermost seventh mansions, where the divine-human spiritual marriage transpires, should be synonymous with the Pauline Inner Person. What she experiences is nothing short of the complete and permanent union of her Inner Person with the Groom; or in other words, a foretaste of the ultimate marriage of the Christian saints with their beloved Lord and Savior to be consummated in the eschaton.

# *The Soul-Spirit Dialogue of Catherine of Genoa (1447-1510)*

The importance of this relatively obscure and uncelebrated saint (as opposed to Teresa of Avila) cannot be overemphasized.[79] In late nineteenth century, a fellow Italian, Baron Friedrich von Hügel, takes notice of Catherine of Genoa and becomes deeply attracted to her life story and her concept of "the soul's self-chosen, intrinsic purification." Hence he spends three decades to research and study the saint, and then another seven years to compose a book about the life and

[79] Nugent, “The Annihilation of St. Catherine of Genoa,” 182.

teachings of Catherine and her followers. He noticed the intricacy of her inner story and decided that "such a delicately psychological, soaring, yet sober-minded Eschatology, with its striking penetration and unfolding of the soul's central life and alternatives as they are already here and now, seemed to demand an ampler study than it had yet received, and to require a vivid presentation of the noble, strikingly original personality from whom it sprang."[80]

Perhaps owing to von Hügel's effort, others began to seriously consider Catherine's great influence to later generations. Olin notes that, other than establishing herself as a staunchest exemplar of self-annihilation for the sake of divine love, she also indirectly ignites the fire of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. He traces this movement to as early as 1497, with the institution of *L'Oratori de l'Amor Diví* (the Oratory of Divine Love), co-founded by one of Catherine's faithful disciples, Ettore Vernazza, in the saint's resident city of Genoa. This oratory marks an effort to continue her legacy of living the love of God through the practice of charity, especially in ministering to the sick. About two decades later, around 1514 to 1517, the confraternity extends a branch to Rome, the establishment of which becomes an event "singled out" by historians, such as Ludwig Pastor, "as marking the beginning of effective Catholic reform [Counter-Reformation] in this troubled age."[81]

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[80] Baron Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends* (London: J M Dent, 1909), v–vi, Preface. von Hügel (1852–1925) was a Catholic Biblical scholar and apologist.

[81] John C. Olin, *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola: Reform in the Church 1495-1540*, First (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 16. Olin (1915–2000) was Professor of History at Fordham University and known for his research of the Catholic Reformation and Renaissance.

# The Life and Works of Catherine

## *Life*

Despite her widespread and lasting influence in the history of spiritual contemplatives, Catherine of Genoa belongs to an unusual category of saints, viz. that of the married and non-cloistered type. Her marriage, though, is involuntarily forced upon her by her guardian brother for the benefit of the family; otherwise, she would have most probably preferred to remain single, since her divine calling occurs quite early, at the age of eight, when she would willingly relinquish the luxury easily afforded by her noble birth, and instead, "was inspired with the desire to do penance, and beginning to dislike the soft indulgence." At age twelve, she received "the gift of prayer, and a wonderful communion with our Lord," although the details of the gift of prayer are not specified.[82] The following year, she has resolved to devote herself to the life of a nun, but was too young to be accepted by her sister's convent, Our Lady of Grace. Her marriage to the Genoese nobleman, Giuliano Adorno, was doomed to be a disaster from the beginning, since he was such an unruly, indulgent worldling with a temperament completely opposite hers, prior to being converted by her. Beginning at the tender age of fifteen and a half, when she got married, the first decade of her marriage life was characterized by severe depression in the first five years, and then a turn to secular (but not immoral) vanities and affairs

[82] St. Catherine of Genoa, *The Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, trans. Isaac Thomas Hecker (New York: Christian Press, 1907), 5. Hecker (1819–1888) was a Catholic priest and founded the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle, or the Paulist Fathers, in New York. He also published *The Catholic World*.

with other female socialites in the next half of the decade.[83] It ended abruptly with a powerful conversion by a call of God.[84]

That fateful event was induced by her cloistered sister, Limbania, who recommended her own confessor, "indeed a holy man," to Catherine in order "to obtain the blessing." And, indeed, the blessing she received at that confession was nothing short of a vocation from God.

> The moment she knelt before him, she was wounded so forcibly with the love of God, and received so clear a revelation of her misery and faults, and of the goodness of God, that she had well nigh fallen to the ground. Overpowered by these emotions, and by her sense of the offences she had committed against her dear Lord, she was so drawn away by her purified affections from the miseries of the world, that she became almost beside herself; … Through the ardent flame of burning love with which she was enkindled, her good God, by his grace, impressed instantly upon that soul, and *infused into it, all perfection*, purging it of all earthly affections, illuminating it with a divine light by which she was enabled to perceive with her *interior eye*, his goodness; and in a word, united her with himself, and changed and transformed her entirely by the true union of a good will, inflaming her wholly with his burning love.[85]

The infusion of "all perfection" into her soul, the purgation of its earthly love, and the illumination of her "interior eye" – is this description not reminiscent of the Pauline and Petrine Inner Person? One can hardly deny that this conversion experience is akin to the awakening and uncovering of her Inner Person, which had been covered by defilements of the world hitherto.

To further deepen her love in her soul, which was "interiorly inflamed with his love," Christ in His passion then appeared to her just-awakened spirit in a vision to allow her to see his cross-bearing and dripping blood, "and this vision so inflamed her heart, that she was more than ever lost in love and grief." With this insight, Catherine began a period of almost fourteen months of "contrition and compunction" as the Lord led her "through the way of satisfaction."

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[83] Carol Lee Flinders, *Enduring Grace: Living Portraits of Seven Women Mystics* (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2007), 135. Flinders has a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature (concentration: medieval literature) from U.C. Berkeley, and teaches Religious and Women's Studies there.

[84] St. Catherine of Genoa, *The Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, 5–6, Ch. 1.

[85] St. Catherine of Genoa, 6, Ch. 2. Emphasis added.

Afterwards, God "relieved her of the sight of her sins so entirely that she never beheld again the least of them."[86] Here we can see a complete transformation of the saint to turn inwards. An appropriate question here would be: Had she not lived a life of utter immersion into the Inner Person, how is it possible for her not to see her own blemishes of the "outward person" – the corrupt fleshly body (cf. Romans 7:18 "… in my flesh dwelleth no good thing"; 1 Corinthians 15:50-53)? Then, another vision showed her Jesus' "Sacred heart … burning with the same flames with which her own was enkindled," which enabled her to say, "I have no longer either soul or heart; but my soul and my heart are those of my Beloved." It would appear that her Inner Person and her Beloved are united as one.

The veracity of Catherine's conversion is demonstrated by her good works externally. Soon after her wondrous experience, she joined the charitable organization, Ladies of Mercy to work for the sick and the poor in her city's slums.[87] In addition, the power of her conversion was extended to the mostly unlikely person, her husband, so that he soon joined the Franciscan Third Order and began to work with her in her charitable career. In turn, she was said to have become a Franciscan Tertiary.

Although never being a nun, Catherine lived a life of self-mortification, at least for a period of four years, of the highest degree. This period followed her conversion from receiving the wound of love. In addition to the many penances, she "mortified all her senses, … deprived her nature of all that it desired, and obliged it to take what it disliked." She would wear hair cloth and avoid all meat and fruit. When sleeping, she purposefully lay on prickly objects. Her natural preferences were so strictly denied by herself to the point of their total decimation, that no temptations could even draw near. Six hours a day she spent on prayer, and the rest of the time

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[86] St. Catherine of Genoa, 6–7, Ch. 2.

[87] Flinders, *Enduring Grace*, 146.

she mainly "appeared like one beside herself, for she neither spoke, nor heard, nor tasted nor valued any thing in the world; neither did she look at any thing." And yet, she was not completely outside of this world, because she obeyed everyone. But then, just as abruptly as her conversion occurred, the four years of self denial also ended suddenly, "so that if she still wished to practice [mortifications], she could no longer have done so."[88]

One of the astounding result of the four-year self-mortifying episode is that "her mind became clear and free, and so filled with God that nothing else ever entered into it." Judging from this account, it would appear that what the apostle Paul had depicted, that "the Inner Person is renewed day by day," is finally being realized in Catherine of Genoa in an uncompromised manner. Her inward renewal was so powerful, that her "outward person" was being separated and isolated so that the latter no longer created whatsoever disservice to her inner tranquility and communion with her Beloved. Her outward physical faculties, no longer a bondage, seemed to have become completely subservient to the dominion of her Inner Person: "At mass and instructions her bodily senses were closed; but interiorly, in the divine light, she saw and heard many things, being wholly absorbed in secret delights; and it was not in her power to do otherwise." As a proof of her unity with the Lord, and a reminder to keep upholding her *selflessness*, He bestows her this trifold mandate: "My daughter, observe these three rules, namely: never say I will or I will not. Never say mine, but always ours. Never excuse yourself, but always accuse yourself." In other words, God is conveying to her that this holy union with Him will become the overarching principle inside her, presumably in the Inner Person, to govern and guide her, if she will keep surrendering her *soulish* life to Him.[89] It is just as the earthly Jesus has promised to the believers: "And when [the Holy Spirit] is come, He will reprove [convict,

[88] St. Catherine of Genoa, *The Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, 9, Ch. 5.

[89] St. Catherine of Genoa, 10, Ch. 6.

YLT] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). The Spirit of God becomes an inner light for our ultimate moral decisions and the guide for mundane living.

### *Literary Works*

St. Catherine is not known to personally produce any written work. All three of the most significant writings of or about her are thought to be written by her disciples, followers, or friends some twelve years after she passed away. They are known to have worked "from extensive notes and dictation they had taken during her lifetime," which give the writings "such a marvelous consistency in the voice that emerges from this material, and such authority and magnificence in the teachings themselves, that scholars have chosen to accept them as essentially accurate."[90] According to von Hügel, "all the biographies of St. Catherine, and all the editions or translations of her 'Works,' are based upon the *Vita e Dottrina* published in Genoa, by Jacobo Genuti, in 1551."[91] However, there is a slight variation in the version provided by Petry: "The *editio princeps* [principal edition] of the so-called *Opus Catharinianum* is the *Libro de la Vita Mirabile e Dottrina Santa de la Beata Caterinetta da Genova* [*The Book of the Miraculous Life and the Holy Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*], Antonio Bellono, Genoa, 1551. This contains the *Life* in fifty-two chapters, the *Purgatory*, undivided, and the *Dialogue* in two parts."[92] Although von Hügel criticized the style of the work as "[including] much secondary, amplifying, repetitive matter; is badly arranged; is kept, almost throughout, above all definite

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[90] Flinders, *Enduring Grace*, 133.

[91] von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 90.

[92] Ray C. Petry, *Late Medieval Mysticism.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 393. Petry (1903–1992) was Professor of Church History at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina.

indications of the precise successions, dates, and places; and is deficient in unity of view and literary organization," he approves the making of this volume and commends its veracity:

> The *Vita* is, in its fundamental portions, the joint production of her devoted disciples, Cattaneo Marabotto, a Secular Priest, her Confessor; and Ettore Vernazza, a Lawyer, her "spiritual son." Its fifty-two chapters … are only in small part narrative; quite thirty-five of them are filled with discourses and contemplations of the Saint, evidently, in the simpler of the many parallel versions accumulated here, taken down, at the time of the Saint's communication of them, with quite remarkable fidelity.[93]

Three books propagated down to us, which are credited to Catherine's faithful followers, represent her major works. The first two are: (1) A biography – mostly in direct quotation of her words as recorded by her inner-circle disciples during their conversations with her throughout the years. (2) A depiction of her inner circumstances written under the guise of a theological treatise called *Purgation and Purgatory*. This work uses the metaphor of purgatory to illustrate her "paradoxical" life of the exceeding joy of knowing her complete union with God, on the one hand, and on the other, the excruciating pain of continuously "undergoing an arduous process of purification, a process that began that very first day [of her wondrous conversion]. Much of it would take place within, as an 'interior fire,' but much of it went on during her daily life, too, in the work to which she felt herself called."[94]

The third work, our focus of analysis, has a long title listing the protagonists: *Spiritual Dialogue between the Soul, the Body, Self-love, the Spirit, the Natural Man, and the Lord God*. It is written in two or three parts (depending on the version), consisting of forty five chapters. Flinders considers the first part to be "a crisp allegorical dramatization of Catherine's inner struggles: of the soul coming to grips first with the claims of the body and then with those of a subtler figure called self-love." This allegory recedes to the background in the second part,

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[93] von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 90–91.

[94] Flinders, *Enduring Grace*, 133, 141.

revealing a truer picture of the transformation in Catherine's spiritual state. The last section mainly deals with her final days.[95]

About this third book, von Hügel raises the issue of authenticity, concluding:

> that this *Dialogue* was at first no longer than its present Part I; that even this did not exist before 1547; that the whole was written by one and the same person, some one who had never (at least intimately) known the Saint, and who had no other direct material than our present *Vita* and *Trattato*; that this person was the Augustinian canoness, Battista Vernazza, Ettore's eldest daughter; and that the whole has been written for the purpose of attempting some unification and systematization of what in the *Vita* appeared to the writer as wanting in unity and in correctness of wording or of feeling.[96]

In spite of its questionable authorship, more modern scholarship, such as the biography written by Umile Bonzi in 1961, vindicates its overall authenticity: "a large part of both works [the *Trattato del Purgatorio* and the *Dialogo*] is her own, though they received their final form only after her death."[97] Also, we have already quoted Flinders' opinion that the overall consistency of voice and authority of teaching throughout her works engender an academic consensus of their fundamental accuracy. Furthermore, acknowledging "that at any point we could conceivably be reading the interpolation of a follower," Flinders nevertheless asserts the general scholarly agreement that the compilers of her materials are both "self-effacing enough" and "unimaginative enough" that they would not intentionally adulterate the result gathered from their memory, notes and materials with significant fabrication or hyperbole. Adding to the above, when these book are published in the early to mid-sixteenth century, many close and immediate followers of Catherine are still living, who ostensibly do not have serious objections to the

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[95] Flinders, 133.

[96] von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, 91.

[97] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Saint Catherine of Genoa: Italian mystic," January 1, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Catherine-of-Genoa.

recorded materials in these books.[98] Even von Hügel himself consents to the undeniable and consistent flow of conceptions in the *Dialogue*. Immediately following his criticism of the dubitable source of the book is found this comment:

> In this case we get a fairly continuous restatement, in part a heightening, in part a minimizing of the historical facts of Catherine's life, which, just because we have thus a pragmatic, theological transfiguration of the older materials, caused by a penetrating admiration, and resulting in some true increase of insight into its subject-matter, forms a precious document for the psychology and the effect of such states of mind. [115, 91-92]

For the above reasons, it is arguable that the *Dialogue* should not be nonchalantly discarded, but rather, quite justifiably this work could be treated as Catherine's own account of what actually transpires inside her soul and spirit. It is precisely this "precious document" of the psychological and anthropological states that we will be analyzing next.

## Catherine's Doctrine of Interiority from the Spiritual Dialogue

If the *Vita* is the biography of Catherine's visible, external history, then the *Dialogue* can be considered its complement – the biography of her hidden, interior aspects – for us to gain a holistic picture of the saint's life stories. Our primary source for this subsection is the 1907 Christian Press version translated from Italian to English by Isaac Thomas Hecker.

A convenient summary is given by the author at the beginning of the book to tell us what each of the three parts consists of:

> In the first part St. Catherine relates in what manner she was captivated by worldly allurements, and how, from this state, she was entirely converted to God, and devoted herself to austere works of penance. In the second, she describes the sublime perfection of the spiritual life in which she is engaged. In the third, she

[98] Flinders, *Enduring Grace*, 133–34.

> discourses of the divine love and of its wonderful effects, and how she has experienced them all in herself.[99]

The word *dialogue* in the title of the book already implies some type of anthropomorphism used. And indeed, all the participants of this great conversation are so transfigured and given a voice of their own. In most instances, they are even capitalized, such as: the Soul, the Body, Self-Love, the Spirit, and Humanity. However, the Pauline term *Inner Person* is nowhere to be found in this book; but that is to be expected, because of its obscurity in the Scripture itself, and also the lack of exposition throughout the Christian history, at least up to her time. As to the reality of the Inner Person, there should be little doubt that it is intimated here, especially by the spirit/Spirit, which is the focal point of our analysis.

### *The Distinction in Capitalization*

From the beginning, the author mixes the capitalization without any explanation or setting any definite demarcation, not just for the spirit, but for the soul, the body, and other players, too. For clarity, we can attempt to distinguish the two cases, for example, by assigning the lower-case "spirit" the meaning of a general functional aspect, while the capitalized "Spirit," the role of an anthropomorphized personality, or its proper name. The following scenario can illustrate the generic functionality of "spirit."

Part two, as the author's beginning summary shows, takes place right after the creature is "despoiled of the world, of the flesh, of her possessions, habits, affections, and, in short, of everything but God." And now God wants to take away "herself also, and to separate the Soul from the Spirit by [an indescribably acute] suffering." So, the separation appears to point to two personalities. Then, divine infusion of a powerful love radically transforms the Soul, and also the

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[99] St. Catherine of Genoa, *The Life and Doctrine of Saint Catherine of Genoa*, 47.

body. "It was as if a chain were extended, by which God, who is Spirit, draws to himself the spirit of man, and holds it absorbed in him. The soul, which cannot exist without her spirit, follows, and is also thus absorbed." Here the lower-case spirit and soul could emphasize their functions in the person. Another place where both lower- and capitalized cases appear together might give us more clue: "… the soul, thus cleansed, remains pure spirit … without hindrance to the Spirit in due season" (Part II, Ch. 1). Here, "spirit" is a functional state of the newly renovated soul, but the Spirit can be deemed the proper name of the human internal faculty, which would be analogous to the Inner Person.

Due to the ambiguous nature of the distinction of the two cases, it is difficult for anyone to speculate on their exact respective meanings intended by the author. Therefore, our analysis below will not take into consideration their differences. When the capitalized "Spirit" is mentioned, it refers to the saint's personified Spirit, and not to God's Holy Spirit, unless indicated otherwise. Another remarkable point is that Catherine inconsistently treats the spirit as masculine (and sometimes neuter, when in juxtaposition with God, to distinguish the two), and other internal divisions (soul, body, human nature, self-love) as feminine or neuter. This might have been done for the purpose of clarifying the pronouns. In this subsection we will attempt to follow her conventions on a case-by-case basis.

## *Spirit's Representation of the Inner Person's Original Countenance*

### ***Resemblance to God***

After the refining process encountered in Part I, having been deprived of all possessions, including the self, now the saint says that the soul, "remains pure spirit." It does not mean that the soul has been merged into the spirit. On the contrary, God's will is to purify the person to

such extend that the Soul and the Spirit are separated (Part II, Ch. 1). Therefore, the soul's "remaining pure spirit" likely mean that both the soul and the spirit are now without blemishes or defilements. It is under such circumstances that "the spirit … is in the fit condition for that end for which it was created by God." Plainly speaking, the spirit has been restored to her original, created stature.

The oft-quoted creation mandate that the Creator imposes on Himself, "to make man in our image, after our likeness," certainly cannot refer to any extrinsic features of God, since He "is Spirit" (John 4:24), and therefore "eternal, immortal, invisible" (1 Timothy 1:17), which is the complete opposite of humanity's temporal, corruptible, visible body. Therefore, whatever "image" and "likeness" in mankind that are molded after God must necessarily point to the spirit or the Inner Person that is not corporeal. In so describing, the original countenance of the Inner Person resembles God, because the human spirit is made in the image and likeness of God.

### *Dominion of the Creation*

Dominion – the power to rule – is the first and foremost purpose in God's creation of Adam and Eve, and the only purpose mentioned in the creation mandate in Genesis 1:26. It goes without saying that God highly esteems and has great missions for humanity, who are the handicraft of His own hands. Unfortunately, as officially recorded, that power had been exercised, at best, just once, in the naming of the creatures by Adam, before the fateful event of the serpent's temptation of Eve and the fall of the First Couple. Thereafter, this reign of the created world entrusted to humans has been withdrawn, or better yet, concealed. Now the fallen mankind must face toils, perils, diseases, corruptions and death in this world. Even so, within each individual and internal cosmos, the Inner Person still has the potential to possess the

dominion thereof, which was a power originally conferred upon Adam and Eve. This fact is revealed from the dialogue between Humanity (human nature) and Spirit in chapter fifteen of part one, where the former complains to the latter about not being supplied with enough "nourishment," and is "thus tormented and imprisoned," even to the point of being "impossible … to persevere in such austerity" (Part I, Chs. 14-15). Here is what the Spirit replies to her:

> I did, indeed, promise that in the end you should be contented with what contents me, but you are looking for what will fatten, and not for what will satisfy … and because I am *not pleased* with this sensible delight, nay, even *abhor* it, I would *have you abhor it* also. You still have natural cravings for this pleasure, and you think I ought to gratify them; *know that I wish to deaden and to regulate* them that they may desire only in accordance with *my pleasure*: it is plain that you are unfirm, and I *shall treat you* as a sick person should be treated. What you desire would injure your health … know that your intellect partakes also of sensuality and therefore you are not a good judge; *my desire* is to devote myself to love, pure and simple … I *declare* to you that I dread far more an attachment to a spiritual than to a natural delight. … I *warn* you not to get angry with me, for you can never obtain your desire and purpose in that way, but rather the contrary; console yourself with patience unmixed with hope. *Conform for the present to my will* – hereafter I may do yours (Part I, Ch. 15, emphasis added).

With what authoritative and commanding voice the Spirit speaks! It is as though he is in a God-given position to rule Humanity – and the rest of the interior cosmos, for that matter. Could this be how the Spirit, the Inner Person, exercises the dominion granted in the beginning of his creation?

### ***Purity***

One of the main purpose of the Spirit's exercising of dominion over the Soul and the Body is to purify them, to be conformed to her own originally created purity. At one point, Humanity is in distress, being forced to choose between two types of sufferings: "I fear both exterior suffering and that interior divine light which terrifies me still more; and hence I am in

great perplexity." The Spirit's consolation, so to speak, is yet another stern warning: "If you choose one of these you will not have the other; but still I warn you that you will lose everything superfluous, in order that I may live, so far as possible, *pure and disengaged, as I was created*; to accomplish this, I shall disregard whatever opposes me" (Part I, Ch. 20, emphasis added). Here we see the intrinsic purity of the Spirit and her insistence to maintain it, to the distress of the human nature. Such tension is similar to what the apostle Paul portrays: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind …" (Romans 7:22-23).

Upon the Spirit's persistence to pursue purity, "the animal imperfections are by degrees destroyed, and the soul, thus cleansed, remains pure spirit, and the body, purged from its evil habits and inclinations, is also pure and fitted to unite itself, without hindrance to the Spirit in due season" (Part II, Ch. 1). We see here that only after the Soul and the Body are purified that they may become united to the Spirit, with her originally created purity, as manifested in the Garden of Eden by the nakedness of Adam and Eve without shame. That equilibrium was perturbed immediately after they have sinned, having lost the original purity, and with it also the innocence of unabashed nakedness. In this regard, Catherine also does not hesitate to use the term *naked* or *nakedness* throughout the book as an insinuation to the unfallen state of mankind.

In Part III (Ch. 11), the narrator commented about the indescribable nature of true nakedness: "I have not spoken well of the nakedness of the Spirit. It is because there are no words by which this nakedness might be expressed, and the soul which finds herself in that condition has in her mind a fulness, a repletion, of which she knows not how to speak." It would appear that nakedness and purification complement each other as means of God for the salvation of humankind.

### *Transcendence*

The Spirit, being so extramundane because nothing comparable to her can be found in this tangible world, naturally is permeated with a transcendent attribute. Through the amazement of the heart and mind, Catherine showcases this aspect of the Spirit, or presumably the Inner Person:

> The heart and the mind of this creature being deprived of all the ways by means of which heaven seemed to make an entrance, now exclaim: We are absorbed in an operation too subtle and secret to be made known by us, but in that occupation a *loving and ethereal* spirit is hidden and restrained which *fills the whole* man so entirely, that Soul, heart, mind, and body, every bone and nerve and vein, are overflowing with it, so that all are absorbed with such a secret and concentrated force, that every sigh struggling from the heart is felt interiorly as a vehement flame (Part III, Ch. 10, emphasis added).

In this respect, the Spirit's weightiness lies in her fullness of love; and her transcendence, in her other-worldly ethereality, consists in being able to be bound by God to Himself (Part II, Ch. 1). Obviously, only identity in essence can engender a perfect union. And in this case, the transcendence of the Spirit and that of God are well matched to effect a seamless bond. Thus, Humanity, in dumbfounded frustration and separation anxiety, utters the truth by saying: "That I should live in this way upon earth while my Spirit is in heaven, is a work surpassing all that I have known, and is the most terrible suffering that can be endured in this world" (Part II, Ch. 11). It does not mean that the Spirit can detach herself from the body; but what disconnection Humanity feels can be ascribed to the ethereal attribute of the Spirit. This is very similar to Paul's experience of rapture, in which he was taken up to the third heaven without knowing whether he was in the body or out of the body (2 Corinthians 12:2-3). In both cases, it suggests that whatever happens to or in the spirit can often surpass the comprehension of the conscious mind of the soul.

Elsewhere, in Part III, Ch. 10, the narrator proclaims similarly:

> O Spirit, naked and invisible, none is able to lay hold of thee, by reason of thy nakedness! Thy habitation is in heaven, albeit with thy body thou yet remainest on the earth. Thou knowest not thyself, nor art thou known by others in this world. All thy lovers and thy kindred who are in heaven are known to thee only by virtue of an interior instinct implanted within thee by the Spirit of God.

Being transcendent, the Spirit may ascend to heaven; and yet, he is also immanent, so he remains on earth. The "interior instinct" was "implanted" by God from the beginning of his creation. For a time, that instinct was lost, but now, after being fully redeemed, he apparently has these spiritual functions restored, as if receiving the Inner Person back, intact and fully restored to the former transcendence and immanence.

### *Repose*

In Part II, after the Soul and Humanity have been refined, the narrator describes the state of the Spirit as being "in the fit condition for that end for which it was created by God; and, stripped of all things, it rests in him as long as it is his good pleasure, provided that the body can endure it and live" (Ch. 1). The Spirit now is in a state of being fully redeemed, and fully restored to her original created condition. Mankind, as the very last creation in the sixth day, so completely satisfied and pleased God, that, for the first time since the first day of creation, He deemed the work "very good" (Genesis 1:31), making humans the superlative creature of all the creation within the six days. Then, a critical event happened on the next day – God "… rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:2- 3). It marks the first time God blessed a day; not only did He bless it, but He also sanctified it, making it holy.

What is the purpose of this holy day? The meaning becomes clear when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. In the wilderness of Sinai, he revealed to them the name of this day – שַׁבָּתוֹן (shab-baw-thone')/Sabbath. It is a holy day of rest in commemoration of God's great creation. God wants mankind to rest from work on this day. But even more importantly, as Catherine indicates, God desires the human spirit, or the Inner Person, to return to its created state of repose. Because of the fall, humanity became subject to labor and toil, lacking peacefulness in flesh, soul, and spirit. But Jesus, as the Son of God, became the Word Incarnate to restore to mankind their original restfulness in God, especially within their spirit. "κύριος γὰρ ἐστιν τοῦ σάββατου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8, direct trans.).

***Liberty***

In chapter nineteen of Part I, Catherine recounts what really transpired internally in her visitation to the poor with the charitable society, Ladies of Mercy. Her Humanity (human nature) was disgusted with the horrible conditions of "these wretched beings, many of whom were intolerable from the filth and vermin with which they were covered … the entrance to their dwellings seemed like the entrance into a sepulchre." Under such inhumane situation, there was a great conflict inside her: "She found her task far worse than she believed, and was assailed, as it were, on both sides, namely, on the side of Humanity, which loathed these miseries, and by the Spirit, which was so lost to every external impression as to be unable to hold converse with creatures." But, since the Spirit at this point was gaining sovereignty over the entire person, Humanity could not help but obey, even though "everything was distressing to her, especially when she found that the Spirit required of her to devote herself to her work, without agitation or

disgust, as she would take bread and put it into her mouth." All these difficulties were put before Humanity to overcome, "because these things were done for the attainment of liberty of spirit."

From the above we can see how critical the Spirit thinks it is for him to obtain, or regain, that freedom which was granted him at God's creation. In the Garden, Adam and Eve were free to do whatever pleased them, with only one exception – the prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). Other than this precept, they lived a life free of restrictions and bondages. The Spirit knows how precious this liberty is, and would force the Soul and Humanity to grant his wish at any cost. It is not just the Spirit who treasures this liberty, but even God also regards it highly, as shown in His declaration in Part III, chapter one:

> Know then, in the first place, that I am God … and know too that I loved man before I created him. I loved him with a love which is infinite, pure, simple, and sincere, and without any cause … I have also provided him amply with all needful means of attaining his end, both with natural gifts and supernatural graces … I am ever surrounding him with my infinite love … that I may bring him under my care. I find in him nothing which is contrary to me but the *free-will* which I have given him, and this I am *always combating through love*, until he yields it to me, and when I have accepted it I reform it little by little by my secret operations and loving care, and never abandon him until I have conducted him to his appointed end (emphasis added).

God so respects the free will of humans, that He never forces them to do His will. The only way He fulfills His purpose in human beings is through that infinite, tender love, which takes away the hardness and resistance of mankind to effect their willing submission to Him. Thus, this "freedom of the will" is the highest honor that the Creator endows the feeble creature called mankind, an honor not bestowed on any other fleshly creatures.[100] Therefore, the one prohibition in the Garden prior to the fall of mankind was, initially at least, really a commandment without real significant substance, until mankind exercised their free will to accept, adopt, and abide by it. In Catherine's eyes, one's willing obedience to God's

[100] Only Satan's creation is more glorious and marvelous than humans. But, he is a spiritual, angelic being. – cf. Ezekiel 28:12-14.

commandments would be, paradoxically, the height of human liberty as it is the restoration of the original freedom granted to the spirit.

### *Hiddenness*

Hiddenness is one of the most fundamental attributes of the Inner Person, because its Creator is Himself hidden in secret – "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself" (Isa. 45:15a) – who made mankind in His image and after His likeness. Throughout the *Dialogue*, not only are the Spirit and the Soul hidden, but even the works performed by God on them, and the love He infused into them are well hidden in secret, too. Most of the time, the divine work on the Soul is done vicariously through the Spirit (distinct from the Holy Spirit), since the latter is, in our estimation, comparable to the redeemed Inner Person that is united with God. The following quotations demonstrate this hiddenness in every aspect (with emphasis added):

> (Spirit:) I will keep the Soul in restraint and in subjection, and inflict upon her, without mercy, all the suffering she can bear. I have her in my hands, and I will leave her so naked, desolate, and forsaken, that she will know not where to turn except for the bare necessities which will keep her alive to suffer a yet longer martyrdom; and this will be *in secret* in order that no one may give her any remedy (Part II, Ch. 9).

The purpose of secrecy in the Spirit's work on the Soul is so that no "remedy" may be provided to the latter. Any forms of remedy, such as consolation or psychological support from others would defeat the purpose to mortify the Soul. This work is too sacred to tolerate any outside interference.

> When the time came which pleased God, he drew the Spirit *so secretly and closely* to himself, that it held no communication with the Soul nor the Soul with the Body, and both were left so bare and dry that it was hard for them to live at all, and especially at the first, when they were passing from one extreme to the other, although God was *secretly* attracting them by little and little (Part II, Ch. 9, emphasis added).

As the Spirit works on the Soul secretly, even so, God works on the Spirit, the Soul, and the Body secretly, separately and without their interaction, all to their respective benefits. This hidden work is beyond human understanding because, as the Lord says through the prophet: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

> … Humanity being always more and more unconscious of those *hidden operations* by which God held her, as it were, bound. Afterwards he took from her her confessor, and everything else towards which she looked for help. Then the Spirit drew her forcibly to himself, because he, in turn, was drawn by God with a *hidden love*, so penetrating and powerful, though without delight, that it melted into itself both Soul and Spirit, while the bodily senses, with everything else, were absorbed in God. This *hidden love* checked, purged, and exterminated all those sins of robbery which had been so secretly and cunningly committed, and thus *in secret* the penance was performed while the cause remained *concealed* (Part II, Ch. 10, emphasis added).

The work of the powerful hidden love is to unite itself to both Spirit and Soul, and to cause the physical senses to diminish (be absorbed in God). This hidden love's work of purgation is akin to a spiritual penance that is carried out in concealment.

> (The Lord:) O beloved Soul, knowest thou who it is that employs my love? He whose heart is pure and empty of every other love. When he has found it, he remains content and satisfied, although he knows not my mode of operation nor his own condition; because love *works in secret and subtly*, without external show. … And therefore the Soul and Spirit, finding themselves so transformed from their wonted habit of loving and acting, and *secretly and strongly swayed* by a higher love, are constrained to ask: "O Lord, what manner of love is this?" (Part III, Ch. 4, emphasis added).

The Lord declares that a person can find His love and be satisfied, but s/he would not know how it works (the mode of operation) due to love's secret nature. Even so, the transformation of the Soul and the Spirit takes place without their awareness.

> The heart and the mind of this creature being deprived of all the ways by means of which heaven seemed to make an entrance, now exclaim: We are absorbed in *an operation too subtle and secret* to be made known by us, but in that occupation a *loving and ethereal* spirit is *hidden and restrained* which fills the whole man so entirely, that Soul, heart, mind, and body, every bone and nerve and vein, are

> overflowing with it, so that all are absorbed with such a *secret and concentrated* force, that every sigh struggling from the heart is felt interiorly as a vehement flame. … The heart is made the tabernacle of God, into which, by himself and also by others, many graces are infused, which *bear in secret wondrous fruits*. This creature has a heaven within herself (Part III, Ch. 10, emphasis added).

Similar to Augustine's "heaven of heaven" and Teresa's "another heaven," Catherine describes the clandestine operation of God to work on the mind and the heart to make way for "heaven," which is the abode of the Almighty. The end result is that a "loving and ethereal spirit" permeates the entire person, and engrosses every part with a hidden and powerful force. The heart being made a tabernacle of God is what Revelation describes at the end: "… Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3b). This is one of the main purposes of God's creation of mankind.

> … for then it [love infused by God] becomes Spirit and unites with the Spirit of man, so that he becomes spiritual. And the Spirit, being *invisible* and *inscrutable* to all the powers of the Soul, man is conquered and subdued … But by reason of this *secret and intimate union* with God, there remains in the Soul a sweet impression … and a zeal so ardent that a man, had he a thousand lives, would risk them all for that *hidden consciousness* which is so strong that hell itself could not destroy it. O Spirit, *naked and invisible*, none is able to lay hold of thee, by reason of thy nakedness! Thy habitation is *in heaven*, albeit with thy body thou yet remainest on the earth. Thou knowest not thyself, nor art thou known by others in this world (Part III, Ch. 10, emphasis added).

The "hidden consciousness" would be comparable to the Inner Person, which is so precious beyond life, that when one realizes its true worth, s/he would risk even a thousand times his or her life to obtain it. Once this inner reality is attained, even hell cannot overcome it.

From the above quotes, we see the hiddenness, especially of the Spirit or Inner Person, in almost every interior aspect within the *Dialogue* – God, love, all the secret works taking place inside, the growth and transformation, the divine union, and the hidden heaven within that "bears in secret wondrous fruits," among other things. Furthermore, a related observation is that the

Spirit's habitation is said to be in heaven, but paradoxically, heaven is brought down to her as a reality hidden within. This paradoxical co-existence of transcendence and immanence could be viewed as the "otherworldliness" of the Spirit or Inner Person that Catherine so eagerly wants the readers to taste and experience for themselves.

### *Spirit's Representation of the Inner Person's Fallen Reality*

Fallenness is indeed the Biblical reality of human nature, and the gravest tragedy in human history. But whose responsibility is it? The inner or the outer person? According to the apostle Paul, it is the "mind" that is the culprit: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). Catherine also takes up this issue in the *Dialogue*. Humanity wrongfully blames the Spirit for this fault by attributing both "reason" and "will" to the latter: "Tell me; have you not been the first to sin, with the reason and with the will? Have I been more than the instrument of sin, truly conceived and resolved upon in the spirit? Who, then, deserves the punishment?" (Part I, Ch. 16). The Spirit's reply reflects the saint's theological understanding of this unresolved enigma in Christianity called human depravity. The Spirit acknowledges the fact of the fall, saying,

> I confess I was the first to commit sin, for, having free-will, I cannot be constrained against it, nor can either good or evil be done if I do not first consent. If I resolve upon the good, heaven and earth yield me their support, and on every side I am encouraged to perform it; it is not possible that I should be impeded, either by the devil, or by the world, or by the flesh (Part I, Ch. 16).

Then, Spirit turns the table on Humanity:

> You know that in the beginning I wished to follow my *spiritual inclinations*, and commenced with great impetuosity; but you *assailed* me with so many *reasons* and under the plea of such pressing necessity, that we were in continual conflict with each other; then Self-Love came as a *mediator*, disagreed with both, and led

> us so far astray that to please you and supply *your needs* I left the right path, and for this we shall be justly punished. It is true that if that great misery, mortal sin, is found among us, which God forbid, I, as *the chief and the most noble*, shall be more sorely tormented than you, but we shall both wish that we had never been created. Therefore it behooves us to *purify* ourselves, not alone from every stain of sin, but also from every smallest imperfection which we have contracted through our evil habits. I will tell you, moreover that God has given me a *light* so subtle and clear that of a surety, unless I fail before I leave you, there will remain in me *no single taint of imperfection* either of soul or body (Part I, Ch. 16, emphasis added).

Therefore, Spirit's original "inclinations" were pure, but he was "assailed" by Humanity with "reasons," which is a function of the soul. Adding to it the counter-productive "mediation" of Self-Love, finally Spirit gave in to the "needs" of Humanity and thus was led astray. Being "the chief and the most noble," though, Spirit remembers that he is the one who suffers most from the inequity. He then quickly regains his soberness and takes the lead to point the way for Humanity to "purification" from both sins and imperfection. And finally Spirit also informs Humanity about being enlightened by God so that he can be free from the stains of the soul and the body. This would be Catherine's narrative of what really transpired in the Garden.

In Catherine's perspective, the Spirit gains divine salvation and purification first, before the soul and the body are redeemed. This is the reason that the awakened Spirit or Inner Person can take charge and force the latter two to go through the tormenting process of purgation.

### *The Starting Point of the Redemption of the Inner Person*

The advent of divine salvation, of necessity, must have its beginning somewhere. For Catherine, the Soul first turned to God and, being enlightened about her sinfulness in a "clear light," uttered theses words: "O Master! what has moved thee to give such light to this Soul, so blind and so corrupt, thy enemy, who goes astray from thee, ever feeding upon sensual things, and who is so unwilling to be lifted out of that condition, that she always shuns whatever would

elevate her? I am stupefied when I consider myself – a creature so entirely vile!" Under such acknowledgement of sinfulness, she was further led by the light

> to see where she was, whither she was going, what would have been her end, and what she would have carried with her to that end had she persevered in her course. She saw at a glance all these things as they were, and as they would have been if God had not interposed. At which sight she was beside herself with fear and agitation, and could do nothing but weep, and sigh, and inwardly lament … For a time this vision remained with her, and caused her such interior suffering that she could neither think of other things nor perform any cheerful action, but remained in a settled melancholy, and knew not what to do with herself, for she could find no rest … Thus the Soul remained almost in despair, powerless to make satisfaction, unable to have recourse to the mercy of God (Part I, Ch. 11).

At this point, the Soul is brought to a state of helpless desperation. This could be what Karl Barth is often quoted for, "The believer sees the beginning of God in the end of man, and the light of His mercy in the tempest of His wrath."[101] His remark can very well describe the inner story of Catherine when her Soul fell into such hopelessness in fear of condemnation from God's righteousness.

> … when God had left her to contemplate it until the impression could never be forgotten, he came to her assistance … One day in her dwelling our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her interior vision, bleeding from head to foot, so that the blood seemed pouring in a stream from his body as he passed; and in secret she heard these words: "Seest thou this blood? it is shed for love of thee, and in satisfaction for they [*sic*] sins." At these words she was pierced with a deep wound of love for him, our Lord Jesus Christ, and at the same time her confidence returned and banished her despair, so that she began to rejoice a little in our Lord (Part I, Ch. 11).

First, God's sovereign will dictates that He would not immediately come to her rescue, because the "impression" was not deep enough yet. When the perfect timing came, Jesus Christ appeared to her with the symbolic representation of the full force of the centrality of His redemptive salvation – profusely bleeding for her sins, in satisfaction of God's wrathful

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[101] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn Clement Hoskyns (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 201. Barth (1886–1968) was a Calvinist theologian and professor of theology in Göttingen, Münster and Bonn, in Germany, and then, after being deported by Hitler, also a professor in Basel, Switzerland.

righteousness. Indeed, the kind words of Jesus at such a desperate time for Catherine allowed her to see God's "mercy in the tempest of His wrath." At once, her agitated and worrisome Soul was appeased, her confidence of salvation restored, and her inner being deeply wounded by divine love. This understanding of the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus would be the first step of purification for the saint, and indeed, for all believers, in conformance with the teaching of the apostle John: "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Next, the narrator (obviously not Catherine herself) recounts one of her visions which is quite reminiscent of the apostle Paul's enlightenment experience on the way to Damascus, both involving great and powerfully transforming light.

> While occupied with these thoughts it chanced that the saint found herself in a church, and received communion, and there came upon her a ray of spiritual light with such force that both Soul and Body seemed to have entered together into life eternal … So great was the illumination and the feeling of divine things which they enjoyed that even Humanity feasted upon them … (Part I, Ch. 14).

Not every Christian has the same salvific experiences as Paul and Catherine, but all true believers appear to share one commonality: their redemption all seems to originate from an unambiguous internal encounter with Divinity. For Catherine, the description above is comparable to what the earthly Jesus refers to as *being born again* (cf. John 3:3-8). It is quite possibly a story of the Inner Person's salvation. And yet, the saint avers that it is also a story of entrance into "life eternal" for the Soul and Body. In other words, Christian rebirth – redemption and salvation – are for the totality of the human being, not just for the inner Spirit. The Spirit is but the first to be awakened and thus is assigned the leading role for the entire pack to eventually follow his suit.

## *The Pivotal Points of the Restoration of the Inner Person*

It would not be too far off to say that the main purpose of God's salvation for the human race is to restore what they have lost in the fateful fall of Adam and Eve. The key point and priority of recovery, then, would most likely be the Inner Person, due to the critical and commanding position it occupies in the entire person.

### ***The Restoration of Status***

For a glance of what the status of the originally created Inner Person is, we may reference Catherine's portrayal of the Spirit's self-proclamation as "the chief and the most noble" (Part I, Ch. 16). As the highest ranking authority within the human interior cosmos, the Spirit was given the utmost nobility by God at his creation. But, for the fallen and unredeemed, the Spirit or Inner Person is concealed in so many layers of ignorance and defilement, that his influence, especially his reigning power, sinks into complete oblivion. In the *Dialogue*, having been awakened and restored first, the Spirit can be seen to take charge in every aspect of the conversion of the Soul, the Body, and Humanity, effecting the restorative and redemptive work of God for the entire person. Apparent, then, the Spirit, or the Inner Person, acting as the head and master of the total human being, represents God in the inmost part of the person. It is, therefore, a matter of course that God should consider the restoration of the Spirit's status the top priority in His work of salvation.

### ***The Restoration of Purity***

During the process of cleansing, mostly by deprivation, Humanity feels so miserable, as we have seen from Part I, chapter 16, that she accuses the Spirit of sinning first, and the Spirit

readily admits to that fault. But the Spirit reminds Humanity that "great misery, mortal sin" would have a much more detrimental effect on himself, "as the chief and the most noble." For this reason, the Spirit concludes that both of them should be subject to purgation from not only "every stain of sin, but also from every smallest imperfection which we have contracted through our evil habits." The Spirit willingly condescends to Humanity's lower position to convince her about taking the painful purgation together (indicated by his use of the plural, first person pronoun), when, in fact, he has already been enlightened and purified – having been given "a subtle and clear" light, to the effect that no imperfection remains in him.

The Spirit's purity comes through loud and clear again towards the end of Part I, in chapter 20, when he sternly cautions Humanity: "… I warn you that you will lose everything superfluous, in order that I may live, so far as possible, *pure and disengaged, as I was created*; to accomplish this, I shall disregard whatever opposes me" (emphasis added). The Spirit knows that his original creation was without blemish and encumbrance. Furthermore, he also claims that he must remain as such, implying that he has already been restored to that original pure condition, but now demands the cooperation and purification of other constituents for him to continue living in this state of purity. The Spirit is here acting as a commander in chief to lead the troop of the whole person through the entire process of purification.

### *The Restoration of the True Self*

Right from the beginning, the Soul shows her ignorance when she tells the Body, "God has created me to love, and to enjoy myself; I wish, therefore, to go where I can best accomplish this design, and to have you accompany me in a friendly way, since it will be to your advantage also" (Part I, Ch. 1). The plain truth is, nevertheless, that God did not create humans just so they

can "love and enjoy" themselves, although if they prove to be obedient to God, that is certainly one of the concomitant benefits of divine grace. The condition, though, is that they must fulfill their duties first, the primary one being "to have dominion over" the created earth (cf. Genesis 1:26). The fallen and unredeemed Soul has lost that sense of "true self" as God designed her to be. The Body's reply is equally uninformed: "I think it would be well to take with us a third companion … Let it be Self-Love, who lives with us both; he will see that I have what belongs to me, and I shall enjoy with him. He will do the same for you, and thus, both will be satisfied, each in his own way." It is because of the depraved delusions of the Soul and the Body to love and enjoy themselves that Self-Love comes into being, or at least, becomes aggrandized. The Soul's fear for God is still not totally lost, since she says to the other two, " … we all agree and understand that, above all things, we are to avoid offending God. Therefore, if either of us sins, the others will check the offender" (ibid.). However, this seemingly benign, innocent desire to please the self can easily turn into egocentrism and stray from God's original design.

This subtle problem of the love of the self is a major cause that the true Self, the real face of the Inner Person, becomes densely concealed. The entire Part I, with all its austere penances, can thus be viewed as being devoted to the diminishing, even decimation, of this egotism. After this painful process, in Part II, having been purged of impurities, Catherine reviews the wonderful works of God in her soul to allow a stream of new love to flow in, attracting her to turn more and more completely towards God and to live for Him only. Henceforth, the saint begins to disclose the story of restoration of her true Self. One of the most tell-tale sign of the indication of her true Self's emergence is possibly through the use of the term *naked* or *nakedness*, which we previously associate with purity.

Chapter two of Part II describes the condition of Soul, Body, and Humanity when Spirit is received into God, and the body and Humanity seem lifeless, having been deprived of natural senses. Then Soul laments to the Lord:

> Formerly the intellect, the memory, and the will, were conscious of thy love in all their operations, which they performed according to thy ordination, with great satisfaction to themselves and to all with whom they had to do: this was through thy sweet concurrence, which gave a zest to every act. Now I am *naked* and *despoiled* of all things and *deprived* of the power to love and to operate as I was wont to do. What then shall I do, living and yet dead, without understanding, without memory, and without will, and what is worse, without love, bereft of which I did not believe it possible to live … ? (emphasis added).

Soul thinks that she has detrimentally lost everything, even the love and enjoyment of God. Unbeknownst to her, she is being returned to the original, unfallen condition, in which she was not supposed to participate in so many sensory activities. Thus, now under God's providence, she experiences the senses of nakedness, despoilment, and deprivation, all intending to the benefit of the true Inner Person, the true Self. For the same purpose, Humanity is also subject to the same reduction treatment: "But abandoned and deserted Humanity, how shall it live, parched, naked, and powerless? It has eyes and sees not; nostrils and smells not; ears and hears not; mouth and tastes not; a heart and cannot love!" (Part II, Ch. 2). In Part III, we see the result of this work on the Soul:

> … when the Soul is deprived of all sensible and active love, Humanity is left abandoned and forsaken, like one dead. But God performs another loving work, so secret and so subtle that the Soul becomes *more noble* and *more perfect* than before, by reason of the destitution and the nakedness in which God leaves her, so that without other support she *rests*, firm and stable, *on him alone* (Part III, Ch. 9, emphasis added.).

Since the nakedness of the Soul results in her being "more noble and more perfect," and enables her to "rest" on God singularly, it indicates unmistakably that she has been restored to an ever closer condition to that of the original creation, which alone satisfies God. In retrospective, then, her prior preoccupation with "enjoyment and love of God" is but an illusion of a fallen and

false self, contrary to God's original design, and cannot withstand the divine refining fire (cf. Malachi 3:2-3).

As for the Spirit, his nakedness is even more sublime than that of the Soul:

> O Spirit, *naked and invisible*, none is able to lay hold of thee, by reason of thy nakedness! Thy habitation is in heaven, albeit with thy body thou yet remainest on the earth. Thou knowest not thyself, *nor art thou known* by others in this world. All thy lovers and thy kindred who are in heaven are known to thee only by virtue of an interior instinct implanted within thee by the Spirit of God (Part III, Ch. 10, emphasis added).

The Spirit's nakedness, as we can see above, is truly out of this world, literally. It is so pure and transparent that no one can grasp it, nor understand it, because it is the result of God's finished refining and depriving work, leaving the Spirit without dross or blemish – nothing worldly is binding it that the secular eye can see. It has now become the true Self, in the sense that the God-implanted "interior instinct" shines forth. This instinct is comparable to "the breath of life, חַיִּים נְשָׁמַת" that God breathed into Adam's nostrils upon his creation (cf. Genesis 2:7). Then, Catherine continues her hymn of praise for this newly restored Spirit:

> O that I could find words fitting to describe that gracious friendship and that vanished union. Vanished, I say, because so far as man is concerned he has lost completely all expressions, that is, of love, union, annihilation, transformation, sweetness, softness, goodness; has lost, in short, all forms of speech by means of which the absolute union of two separate things could be expressed and comprehended, where nothing remains but one pure Spirit, active, and simple, and incomprehensible (ibid.).

At this juncture of a complete manifestation of the true Self, the Soul and the Spirit can be considered to be in a complete union with God. Here, Catherine cannot help but turn apophatic, "… there are no words by which this nakedness [of the Spirit] might be expressed, and the soul which finds herself in that condition has in her mind a fulness, a repletion, of which she knows not how to speak" (Part III, Ch. 11). In this interior state, words are no longer appropriate to encompass the "absolute union" of the true Self with the Divine into "one pure

Spirit" – which is "active," because it is dynamic and non-static; "simple," since it is free from encumbrance and adulteration; and "incomprehensible" as a transcendent, divine, mysterious reality.

### *The Crucial Aims of the Ministration of the Inner Person*

In general, God's work of redemption in mankind follows His principle from the interior outward towards the physical part ("Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life," Proverbs 4:23). Therefore, the Inner Person is certainly the priority in His focus, since it is the innermost point and the basis from which all other works proceed. From God's perspective, if He cannot obtain control of the Inner Person, there could be no human salvation. From our perspective, if we cannot discover and realize the existence of the Inner Person, we can at best pursue religious duties and ascetic practices on the periphery without touching the central essence.

Concerning the ministration of the Spirit, his objects are the Soul, the Body, Humanity, Self-Love, and perhaps also the mind and the intellect; all the latter entities might be encompassed under the general classification of the soul. When "ministering" to them, the Spirit usually does not affectionately try to convince them with words of kindness and pacification; contrarily, he mostly demands and commands them as a rightfully appointed leader and chief officer. That is, the Spirit or Inner Person, standing tall as God's representative, sternly and even ruthlessly executes the missions and duties committed to him, which mainly consist of the rectification of his fallen, unredeemed subjects' wrongful habits and conditions, down to every detail of life. Paul's teaching that "… to his own master he standeth or falleth …" (Romans 14:4) seems particularly applicable here. The following categories of his ministration can be gleaned.

### *Purification*

The Spirit, having been purified, knows how important it is to be purged of all ungodliness. We have seen in Part I, chapter 16, how he, "the chief and the most noble," condescends to the position of humanity to demand her purification both from sins and from other imperfections. Every little blemish in Humanity is to the Spirit too painful to tolerate as a grain of sand in the eye. The Spirit justifies his demand with the following reasons:

> Note this well: How long, think you, will this season of purification last? You know well that it can endure but a short time. In the beginning it seems terrible to you, but as it goes on you will suffer less, because your wicked habits will be destroyed; do not fear lest you should want powerful support, for know that God, by the decree of his goodness, never allows man to suffer beyond his strength. If we regarded our own proper good, it would seem better to us to suffer here for a little than to remain in torments forever; better to suffer for a thousand years every woe possible to this body in this world, than to remain one hour in purgatory. I have briefly made this little speech for your comfort (Part I, Ch. 16).

Firstly, the duration of purification is short. Secondly, the feeling of suffering will gradually subside as malicious tendencies are being removed. Thirdly, and most importantly, our good God will not allow His people to suffer beyond their capacity. It is as the apostle Paul teaches, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). As such, and in comparison, any suffering here during the earthly life is much easier to endure than a single moment in purgatory. This topic of purgatory, which is a major theme in the saint's life, as referenced earlier, is further expanded in Part II, chapter 2, where the narrator exclaims:[102]

> Oh, what a sweet and cruel purgatory is this hidden one on earth! It is sweet in comparison with the purgatory of the life to come, but to us it appears cruel when we see a body on this earth suffering so intolerably. Yet what seems cruelty to us is truly a *great mercy* of God, although a *hidden and unsuspected* one. To him

[102] Flinders, *Enduring Grace*, 133.

> who is *enlightened*, this work is evidently done by *love*; only the blind would endeavor to escape it, but in vain. We are all sinners, and how much better is it to be cleansed here than in the other life! For whoever suffers *purgation in this life* pays but a small portion of what is due, by reason of the liberty of his *free-will* cooperating with *infused grace*. God never subjects man to this discipline until he has obtained from him his free consent. For a moment it is put before him, and accepting it of his own free-will, he puts himself into the hands of God to be dealt with according to his pleasure (emphasis added).

The unimaginable mercy of God is well hidden in His purgation of the human soul, and only the enlightened eye can see divine love through this suffering. Here, Catherine explains why it is much less severe to suffer purgation in this life than in the afterlife – because now we may exercise our free will to yield ourselves to God's hands of purgation, whereas in the purgatory to come, free will no longer can be wielded, and purgation is utterly involuntary. But God so respects the free will of mankind in this life that if they refuse His purification, He will retrieve the hands of discipline, and the project of purification will not be completed presently, but needs to be delayed till afterwards, where the magnitude of suffering is greatly multiplied.

Furthermore, purification is not just for the treatment of negative aspects, but it has a higher aim, as the Spirit proclaims to the Soul: "Learn what a task it is to purge a soul here below and restore her with no further purgatory to her *pristine purity*. And when it is God's will to *elevate her to a high degree of glory*, it becomes more especially necessary, not alone to purify her but to make her pass through many cruel sufferings that she may gain merit by many and grievous pains" (Part II, Ch. 9, emphasis added.). Therefore, even after the soul is purified to the extent of originally created "pristine" condition, further "cruel sufferings" and "grievous pains" may follow, all intended to raise her to a higher, more glorious plane. The higher the glory, the deeper the glorification, and the more severe the afflictions.

The Soul, after divine purgation, begins to sing praises to the love of God. In Part III, chapter four, she declares in amazement:

> O love, the Soul that feels thee, begins even in this world to possess eternal life … Divine love brings with it every good and banishes every evil. O heart, wounded with divine love, thou art forever incurable, and dying of this sweet wound, thou dost enter upon never-ending life. O fire of love, what doest thou in man? Thou purifiest him as gold is purified by fire, and dost conduct him with thee to that country and that end for which he was created.

Love is God's best instrument for purification of the soul. On the one hand, it is sweet to the soul, but on the other hand, it is fierce as fire. It creates an intoxicating "sweet wound" which leads the soul to life eternal. The great love of God, through purification, brings those subject to it to the promised land, the prescribed destination of mankind in creation.

> Oh, how few creatures are conducted by this road of secret and penetrating love, which keeps both Soul and body in such subjection that it leaves no imperfection in them, for pure love can comport with none, however slight; and it perseveres in its sweet action in the Soul until it purifies her entirely, so that she can reach her proper end without passing through purgatory (Part III, Ch. 10).

One would think that this true love from the Creator should be readily available to the creatures; after all, they are all His handiworks. Yet, the Soul exclaims otherwise: how blessed and rare those who find this love are; and that is due to its clandestine and pure nature. Anything incompatible must be excluded, and in the fallen world, nothing qualifies as such, per se, except those purged by God's refining blaze. To those who have been through the divine fire, though, what a blessing they have received. Albeit "the LORD thy God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24a, cf. Hebrews 12:29), that love they come to embrace is none other than God Himself, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8b, cf. v. 16).

### *Submission*

This is an essential lesson for anyone who desires to follow the Lord. In the beginning, when Humanity is still untamed, the Spirit speaks harshly to her in warning:

> You are gall and poison in every viand that I attempt to taste, and until I have destroyed you I shall never be at peace, for you seem bent upon doing your worst. I too shall do what is possible to free myself quickly from you; … I warn you not to get angry with me, for you can never obtain your desire and purpose in that way, but rather the contrary; console yourself with patience unmixed with hope. Conform for the present to my will – hereafter I may do yours (Part I, Ch. 15).

The Spirit knows what is best for himself and for Humanity also. Therefore he demands her to obey his lead. In another place, he again cautions, "… I wish to teach you what it is to be obedient, in order that you may become humble, and subject to every creature; … I wish, further, that whenever and wherever you are called to perform works of mercy, you should go to the infirm and to the poor of every condition. I wish you never to refuse" (Part I, Ch. 18). The Spirit's standard of obedience is very high; Humanity must submit to not only him, not only all other persons, but "every creature." The Spirit knows quite well that this is the only way to tame the deeply fallen human nature and to rescue her from the mire. Specifically, he subjugates Humanity to "live with creatures in a state of great subjection, … in subjection so great that [she] will have no place in the world where [she] can turn for the least repose …" (Part I, Ch. 20). It is not just Humanity that receives such discipline, but the Soul also, and perhaps even more severely than the former:

> I [Spirit] will keep the Soul in restraint and in subjection, and inflict upon her, without mercy, all the suffering she can bear. I have her in my hands, and I will leave her so naked, desolate, and forsaken, that she will know not where to turn except for the bare necessities which will keep her alive to suffer a yet longer martyrdom; and this will be in secret in order that no one may give her any remedy. Not one of her members shall escape suffering until my work is finished; whosoever shall behold her in such torments will wish her dead, and she would herself wish it if she could do so without sin (Part II, Ch. 9).

The Spirit, or Inner Person's power and will are indeed stronger than the imagination of the unenlightened commoner. The former has a goal in mind, and has determined to reach it at the expense of the sufferings of all other constituents of the inner being. He follows his demands of subjugation with a sustaining power of restraint on them, in complete disregard to their

anguish. With him in charge, in due time, all his subjects cannot help but be mortified, sacrificed, transformed, and reborn. The following are just two quotations out of many that prove this point (emphasis added):

> It was shown to Humanity that whoever would enter life eternal without passing through purgatory, must *die to this world while yet in it*; that is, that all the imperfections of the Soul must be so consumed that she may remain absorbed in God (Part II, Ch. 11).

> [Narrator:] And in order that every imperfection which exists in man may die in God (while man still lives upon the earth), God seems to open a vien [sic.] and *let out the blood* of Humanity, … and when there is no more blood within the body, and the Soul is *wholly transformed* in God, then each goes to its own place, the Soul to her rest in God and the body to the grave; and this work is done in secret and by love alone. If you know how *harassed and besieged* is this poor Humanity, you would in truth believe that no creature suffers so greatly as itself; … Thus Humanity, no longer able to live according to its nature, appears to me to be *always tortured* and *greatly afflicted*. It lives, but knows not how it lives, nor on what food. It desires nothing, but remains in God (Part III, Ch. 9).

### *Separation*

The last, and most unknown prospect of the Inner Person's ministration within the human being would be the separation of the Spirit from the Soul, and from Humanity. For our purposes, since we assign the Inner Person to the Spirit, we may consider this the separation of the Inner Person from the outer person.

At one point, the Spirit compelled Humanity to live in the hospital where Catherine was helping the sick. Humanity found such dedication to the undesirable work taxing on her charitable capacity, so she asked him for "some little accidental love" as a mental support for her continuance. "Accordingly some interest in her work was granted her, for which and with which she continued it, but it was only given just at the point where the work in which she was engaged required it, then it was taken from her, together with the memory of the work; and in these employments, and in great poverty, the Spirit left her for many years" (Part I, Ch. 21). What we

can see is, at least, that the Spirit can theoretically depart from the outer person. As for the reason why the Spirit would do so suddenly, and for such a long time, it is given as his way of discipline for Humanity's "complaint" about the hospital work, "by such trials and humiliations, until she was able to look not only without disgust upon things which at first she naturally loathed, but busied herself unweariedly and willingly with whatever was most offensive" (ibid.).

> She was tried by the Spirit, in this way, for many years, aided by him, however, with all needed hints and suggestions, without which she could not have fulfilled this charge. And with all these employments she remained recollected in that love which was secretly increasing as Humanity was destroyed, for just so far as she became rid of Self-Love, did she become possessed by pure love, which penetrated and filled her in proportion as she became dead to self. And thus this soul, burning with pure love, melted in that divine flame, and as this continually increased, the soul was always consuming with love; therefore she discharged all her duties with alacrity, never resting, that she might forget the flame that devoured her more and more (ibid.).

At this last chapter of Part I, the work on the Soul and Humanity is almost finished, but those last imperfections must be dealt with most rigorously, such as the abandonment of Self-Love, because what lies ahead for the saint is the pure love, which is God Himself, and which would burn away all minute impurities.

In Part II, the vengeful Spirit recalls the former miserable state he was in due to the Soul's ignorant obstruction: "Now is the time for me to repay the Soul for what she has done to me. For many years I have been subject to her, and, with cruelties too great to be described, excluded from my home; for she was so restrained and oppressed by earthly things that the powers I possessed were not sufficient to enable me to attend to my own spiritual concerns" (Part II, Ch. 9).

When the Soul and the Spirit cannot be separated, the whole person is severely wounded and disabled, because the Soul would dominate the person, and most importantly, the Inner Person, so that the latter's great potential power becomes suppressed and the spiritual end

destined by God at creation would be unreachable. What can the Spirit do to counterbalance this overwhelming domination of the soul?

> I called to my aid the certainty of death, the fear of hell, the hope of heaven, preaching, and all other aids afforded by the Church; and also divine inspirations, infirmities, poverty, and other worldly tribulations, in order that, deprived of all things earthly, she might, in her extreme need, when all other resources had failed her, have recourse unto God. But, though in her great necessity she sometimes turned to him and promised with his assistance to do great things, yet when that moment was passed she returned to her accustomed practices and I to my prison; and this has happened many times (ibid.).

The Spirit does have many resources to overturn the Soul's despotic and illegitimate reign, but the scene that St. Catherine discloses to us is nothing short of a fierce long-term battle in which gained ground can be easily lost again. She describes this situation of commingling of the Spirit and the Soul as a "prison" for the former. When the Inner Person, the Spirit, is imprisoned, the liberty in Jesus Christ is nowhere in sight, and the entire being would be lost in secular materialism, which completely engulfs the unredeemed Soul. This mired state can only be dissolved by the separation of the Spirit from the obstinate Soul, which the Spirit finally is empowered to understand and to resolve. He thus says to her: "I mean to separate myself from you, and for the present I will answer you in words; hereafter I will do so more effectually by deeds which will make you envy the dead" (ibid.). After this separation, apparently, the Spirit would be able to deal with the Soul in a stern way, which resembles death of the latter. And it is with divine intervention that the separation could be effected, when by an absorption of the Spirit into Himself, God isolated the Spirit from the Soul and the Body:

> When the time came which pleased God, he drew the Spirit so secretly and closely to himself, that it held no communication with the Soul nor the Soul with the Body, and both were left so bare and dry that it was hard for them to live at all, and especially at the first, when they were passing from one extreme to the other, although God was secretly attracting them by little and little (Part II, Ch. 9).

Depriving the Spirit from the Body and the Soul would engender aridity and nakedness akin to death to the latter two. However, God is secretly molding them. This work is described in Part II, at the beginning of chapter one: "After this creature had been despoiled of the world, of the flesh, of her possessions, habits, affections, and, in short, of everything but God, it was his will to deprive her of herself also, and to separate the Soul from the Spirit by a suffering so acute that it is difficult to describe it or to make it understood by one who has not experienced it." Later in Part II, chapter eleven, the Lord says to the Soul essential the same thing but with further determination: "Henceforth I will not have you interfere with my designs, for you would always rob me by appropriating to yourself what is not yours. I will finish the work, and you shall be unconscious of it. I will separate you from your Spirit, and he shall be lost in my abyss."

Such pain of separation is not the purpose, but a means of God to perfect the Soul, since after the agonizing partition, He immediately follows it with His remedy by "infus[ing] into that heart a new love, so ardent and so powerful that it absorbed into itself the Soul, with all her powers, so that she was raised above her natural condition and so constantly occupied within herself that she could no more take delight in anything nor look toward heaven or earth" (Part I, Ch. 1). The Soul's natural (fallen) inclination was the material world, but now she is elevated to divine love and looks upon her old habits with scornful eyes. God's taking sole possession of the Spirit is His original plan and design at creation, temporarily disrupted by the lapsarian event caused by the satanic serpent, but now in the dispensation of the crucified and glorified Jesus Christ, is again made possible. Therefore, such a human spirit as can be fully possessed by God is ultimately His glory.

## Concluding Remarks on Catherine of Genoa

Owing to Catherine's ingenuity to anthropomorphize the human interior faculties, we are able to learn the story of her internal transformation: how her Spirit had been oppressed by the Soul, Humanity, Self-Love, and Body in the beginning with their worldly inclinations and habits; how he (Catherine uses masculine pronoun for the spirit) was able to separate himself from these "lower parts" through divine assistance; and how eventually he was restored to the original, pristine, created state to take charge of the entire person.

In this "regenerate" state, the Spirit served his proper function as God's duly authorized agent and representative to keep a tight rein on the rest of the person, both internal and external, in an effort to induce, even coerce, their obedience, mortification, and conversion from their natural depraved condition. It was a prolonged, arduous and painful process, during which his "subjects" resisted and argued against his dominance. Due to their rebellious nature, the Spirit needed to resort to extreme measures, often leading them to the point of "death," or total cessation of functional vitality. Little by little, like the protagonist, Christian, in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the Spirit was able to gain ground and proceed toward the lofty destiny, which is union with God Himself.

Even though the term *Inner Person* never appears in the *Dialogue*, the saint's spiritual journey of the interior world makes it almost indisputable that the Spirit could and should be taken as the equivalent of the Pauline and Petrine *Inner Person* in the New Testament. St. Catherine's lifting of the mysterious human internal veil in the form of imaginary dialogues among the constituents of anthropology helps greatly to render transparent many aspects of this mysterious Biblical term called the Inner Person. If this *Dialogue* represents her process of spiritual maturity, which very likely is the case, we may say that she truly gives us a glimpse of

the internal suffering and struggle in an effort to allow the Inner Person (the spirit) to return to its originally created condition, which is to reign the entire being, with its body and soul, and subject it to the rule of God. This internal battle corresponds very well to the apostle Paul's own experience as he put down in Romans chapter seven. Catherine's vivid dialogical exchange among the faculties of human being serves to unpack Paul's concise message in the Romans passage. Both saw the natural divine inclination in the Inner Person, and, in the end, both were able to overcome the tremendous obstacles of human depravity to achieve complete union with the Creator.

## *Chapter Conclusion*

This chapter enlists three Christian contemplatives to provide us their understanding of the human interior construct, thus informing our knowledge of the Inner Person, at least in the Christian sense. None of them talk specifically about the term, but our analysis leads us to very close and almost unmistakable correlations between their description of the innermost part of mankind and the Biblical Inner Person.

## The Visions and the Heaven of Heaven of St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine, as one of the earliest Christian contemplatives, the greatest theologians, and the most prolific ancient writers, records his encounter with the Divine in his unique autobiographical writing, the *Confessions*. There, he recalls his three extramundane visions graciously bestowed by God at critical stages of faith in his life. Retrospectively, he is able to provide us his analysis, that he saw the vision with "the soul's eye" and heard God's words "within the heart." He relates his second vision as a successive, inward ascension "from bodies to

soul, … to its inward force, … to the power of reasoning, … to the level of its own intelligence." In his final and highest "intellectual" vision, he recounts a direct conveyance of God speaking "through himself" without any physical, mental, or spiritual mediation. This level of communication would seem possible only if there is a direct and intimate bond between the Spirit of God and the spirit of mankind, which, as we surmise, would be none other than the Inner Person deep within.

Augustine also allegorically interprets God's very first creation act of the "heaven of heaven," which preceded the birth of time and the material cosmos, since no chronological reference is given in the first verse of Genesis. The saint equates it to Wisdom as depicted in the Proverbs, but diverges from most later commentators who see the Son of God as being typified. Instead, Augustine gives the heaven of heaven many personal and inter-personal attributes closely connected with God, and terms it "the realm of the intellect." It is so lofty as to surpass our normal (fallen) human consciousness and so intimately communicating with the Spirit of God as to transcend our natural mental capacity, that to associate it with the Inner Person seems quite logical and conceivable.

## The Spiritual Marriage of St. Teresa of Avila

Teresa's spiritual ascension to the attainment of spiritual marriage with God is written as seven progressive stages in her *Interior Castle*. From this writing, and two other books, the autobiographical *Life* and the historiographical *Book of the Foundations*, we gain certain degree of understanding of her interior life.

At first, she was granted an unmistakable sense of divine presence but without seeing or hearing anything extraordinary. Then came the opening of her spiritual eyes (but not "with the

eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul") with which she "saw" an intellectual vision of Jesus. It was an impression of divine knowledge that imparts an absolute certainty, much beyond the visible world. Her final phase of spiritual progress is the experience of the Trinitarian mystery, from which she writes her most influential book, the *Interior Castle*. It is in this book that she records the experience of her mutual indwelling with the Three Persons of the Trinity, in a very private, specially reserved place in the depth of her spirit.

The *Interior Castle* describes the human soul as a structure of a diamond or clear crystal, with incomparably "magnificent beauty … and marvelous capacity." It has such high dignity and beauty because it is fashioned after the image of its Maker. It has such vastness that Teresa subdivides it into seven levels of mansions, each possessing innumerable rooms in all directions and each denoting a particular stage of spiritual maturity. She laments that many souls are just wandering "in the outer courtyard" without intending to enter the wonderful, precious castle, when in fact, if they would just take up inward-turning prayer, they could all enter it. Accordingly, most people, without spending much effort to turn inward, seldom find the bountiful spiritual paradise within, as she did.

But entrance into the castle is not the assurance of eternal life, since at least in the first few mansions the devils can still wreak havoc to the soul by deception and temptation. It is imperative that the soul first enters the room of self-knowledge to discover its own humbleness, and never forsake this foundation. In the first few stages, human exertion is required, for example, to shun sinful conducts and to respond promptly to God's calling, because dangers of regression lurks everywhere. Spiritual consolations and joys should not be sought, as they contribute to a weak foundation. On the contrary, dryness and the cross (suffering) are to be welcomed. One should also manage time and speech well, and practice the love of neighbors,

whilst always keeping in mind to check spiritual pride regardless of one's progress. One's love toward God is the measure He uses to grant His favors; therefore there must be a great determination of the will to prove our love by action.

From the fourth mansions on, supernatural power takes over self assertion and impresses indescribable beauty of the castle on the soul, which is brought to this stage not through her own effort, but by God's sovereign will. What advances the soul now is simply the love for God, in striving to please Him in all things possible. At the fifth mansions, God demands a total surrender of the person as a prerequisite for union with Him, which is a state likened unto death with complete cessation of the soul's functions. Because now the soul is so aligned with God's will, it desires solitude from the world and suffering for Him; external afflictions no longer disturbs its repose.

At the sixth stage, God further purifies the soul to ready her for the betrothal, with great interior and exterior trials that are almost too severe to bear. Such dark night of the soul can only be alleviated by divine mercy at His time. All natural faculties seem to die off so as to allow the spirit, or the Inner Person, to be restored to its active, lively condition, for the purpose of serving and communicating with God.

The seventh mansions are comparable to the Holy of Holies in the Hebrew Bible, similar to what Martin Luther asserts, where God alone dwells. Teresa calls it "another heaven," which is akin to Augustine's "heaven of heaven," and this is also the place for the spiritual marriage to occur. Here, intellectual visions enable the person's spirit to see the three Persons of the Trinity. They radically differ from prior raptures of the soul in that now the presence and sight of the Triune God are constant, without ceasing, and the intensity of unitive joy much greater than the betrothal and all previous stages. Now, the delicate difference between the soul and the spirit

becomes readily distinguishable, and the spirit or Inner Person remains in divine presence regardless of outward circumstances, no matter how tempestuous. The climactic conclusion of spiritual marriage in the *Interior Castle* marks the zenith in the Christian pilgrim's journey while on earth. It is the result of continually turning inward to follow the proper, God-given course of the Inner Person.

## The Spiritual Dialogue of St. Catherine of Genoa

Through this intriguing work of Catherine, we get to see how she categorizes the interior faculties of the soul, and what her perceptions are of their interactions in her spiritual pilgrimage to achieve the unitive vision of God while she is still in the flesh. The *Dialogue* has three main partitions. In the first, she records her inner struggles when turning from a slave of worldly affinity towards the interior spiritual calling of God, gradually terminating the dominance of the Soul, Body, Humanity, and Self-love over the Spirit, and restoring the latter to its rightful position as intended by God in creation. Having regained the reign, in the second and third parts, the Spirit as the Inner Person wields its formidable, sometimes ruthless, power of will over the Soul, and in turn, the Body, forcing the entire person to conform to the Spirit's willingness for God's further austere refining to perfection. According to the saint, this process of purgation is a grace from God, since much suffering in this life can confer one the privilege of bypassing the infinitely much worse agonies of the purgatory in the afterlife.

From the dialogs among the major conversers – the Lord, Spirit, Soul, Humanity, Body – we gain some perspectives of what the Inner Person (the Spirit) should be like for the unfallen Adam and Eve. Its attributes may include: likeness to God, dominion of the created world (now reduced to the inner cosmos), purity like the original human nakedness, sublime transcendence

comparable to God's Spirit, repose as effected by the Lord of the Sabbath, liberty from the bondage of bodily senses and free will to obey God, and hiddenness as that of God Himself.

Through progressive visions, Catherine first experienced her spirit being revived and restored by the Lord. However, initial divine sparks also call for human cooperation, which consists in their exercise of the God-given free will, to become a full flame. In her case, this cooperation with the Lord by her Spirit to deal with the rest of her, Soul, Body, Humanity, etc., is what constitutes the major theme of the *Dialogue*. Therefore, the fallenness of humanity becomes the most arduous work for the newly awakened Spirit to counteract and redeem.

The awakened Spirit or Inner Person is installed as the chief administrator and charged with the responsibility to convert and redeem his subjects, which are the rest of the entire person. One of the priorities of this godward project is to rebuild the original purity, by the purgation of sins and other imperfections. The first major obstacle would be the love of the self within the Soul and Humanity. The Spirit is given no other alternatives but all kinds of austere practices to tame this beast within, even to the point of "death" for the Soul and Humanity. Realistically, it is Catherine's outward sensory activities that are being extinguished, to steer her undivided attention and love toward God. In sense-perception terms, it resembles death of the soul and a decadence of vitality. But, in spiritual perspective, the entire person is being reinstated to the originally created "true self" that submits to God in all things, desires only Himself, and can be united with Him fully. That true self would be the Inner Person in the New Testament.

A most important but neglected aspect of the Inner Person's work on the entire being is the separation of the spirit and the soul. Coincidentally, this is also one of the major attainments in Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle*, at the final stage of the spiritual marriage. This work is critical for the liberation and restoration of the Spirit, since, otherwise, the habitual suppression

of the Soul upon the Spirit would prevent the rightful dominion of the Inner Person over the entire being, in conformity with the created order. This crucial separation can only be effected by divine attraction of the Spirit to God Himself, and by His deprivation of the natural life of the Soul. This is God's way of the total transformation of His saints. In the end, Catherine's Inner Person attained the inseverable union with God Himself, just as Teresa's spiritual marriage and Augustine's heaven of heaven have ultimately achieved.

From this very small sample of Christian contemplatives, we venture to conclude summarily that the main attraction of their undivided devotion to God and the source of endurance for the sufferings in the earthly life is none other than the calling of the enlightened Inner Person, which was awakened by divine grace to provide the bridge between the transcendent Creator and the immanent interiority of humankind, as intended in His creation. Whether that deepest center of mankind is called "the heaven of heaven," "the other heaven," or "the Spirit," for these saints it is the locus of divine-human communication and union, and it points to the Pauline and Petrine *Inner Person* in a clearly identifiable way. The knowledge gained through this analysis will serve as part of the foundation for our comparison project in subsequent chapters.

# CHAPTER 4. A CLOSE READING OF THE *TATHĀGATAGARBHA* OF BUDDHISM

In this chapter, we will explore the central instrument of this comparison project, viz., the *Tathāgatagarbha* of Buddhism. The word *Tathāgatagarbha* is a compound of separate parts, as many Sanskrit words are. It can be viewed as composed of either (1) *tathā* + *āgata* + *garbha*, or (2) *tathā* + *gata* + *garbha*. In the first case, the literal meaning is "thus + come + womb or embryo"; in the latter case, "thus + gone + womb or embryo." As a proper noun, *Tathāgata*, "the thus come/gone one [如來 rú lái ]," in Buddhism, is one of the ten epithets (十號) for Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha, carrying the implication "that the Buddha's achievement of enlightenment has come through a path of practice that other sentient beings can follow. … It is also interpreted as 如去 [rú qù] … as he who so goes, or 'thus gone' (tathā + gata) – his coming and going being both according to the Buddha-norm. … It is the most exalted of a buddha's titles."[1] Chinese translation traditionally takes the first case, "thus come." Conze remarks, "Just as *tathatā* [true suchness, 真如 *zhēn rú*] designates true reality in general, so the word which developed into 'Tathāgata' designated the true self, the true reality within man, the kind of person whom the Buddhist doctrine tries to produce, a Buddha, a Tathā-gata, who 'has come to the real Truth,' or 'who has gone there,' i.e. to liberation, his true goal."[2]

The word *garbha* also carries a double meaning, as either embryo or womb. In the former sense, it renders the compound *Tathāgatagarbha* a potential to attain buddhahood – "'embryonic

[1] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "如來" [Thus-come], by Charles Muller, last modified October 31, 2008, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?59.xml+id(%27b5982-4f86%27). Muller (1953–) is Professor Emeritus on the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo; he is also a faculty in the Department of Education at Musashino University.

[2] Edward Conze, ed., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*, Wheel Series 1 (Bolinas, CA: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), xix. Conze (1904–1979) was a scholar of Marxism and Buddhism, known primarily for his commentaries and translations of the Prajñāpāramitā literature.

Tathagata' (i.e., the incipient Buddha)," whereas the latter case indicates "that which possesses the essential attributes of the Tathagata in their fully developed form." The former is frequently associated with the "cause" and the latter with the "fruit" of *Tathāgata*, with the latter representing "the fulfillment of the Buddha Path … linked with such terms as *dharmakāya*, *nirvāṇa*, perfect wisdom, and realization."[3] The tendency of Chinese and East Asian Buddhism is to adopt the "womb" interpretation, rendering the word 如來藏 (*rú lái zàng*, womb of the Thus-Come One), where the word *藏 zàng* means storehouse, a euphemism for "womb," rather than "embryo." As an example, this exact term occurs eighteen times in the 佛性論 (*Fuó Xìng Luèn*, *Buddha Nature Treatise*, T31n1610) to designate the buddha nature as stored within all sentient beings.

Therefore, *Tathāgatagarbha*, whether representing an embryo of the buddha, or a womb of the fully matured buddhahood, or even one's "true self," has important repercussions in Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly the schools of East Asian Buddhism. Understanding the nuances of its meanings, developments and usages will set the stage for us to perform our comparative analysis in the next chapter. First, I will examine the closely related Buddhist views of consciousness and the self, before exploring buddha nature and *Tathāgatagarbha* proper. The monumental *Tathāgatagarbha* scripture, *Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra*, will then be selectively analyzed.

## *Consciousness – Vijñāna*

The Buddha's Four Noble Truths, as the overarching foundation of Buddhism's central outlook of this world, consist mainly in the recognition and elimination of the universal human

[3] King, *Buddha Nature*, 4.

problem of suffering (*duḥkha* 苦 *kǔ*), the cause of which is primarily attributed to ignorance (*avidyā* 無明 *wú míng*) – "traditionally defined as regarding what is impermanent as permanent, what is suffering as pleasure, and what is non-self as self."[4] Specifically, ignorance involves grasping or attachment (*upādāna* 執著 *zhí zhuó*) to the appropriated five aggregates (*pañca-upādāna-skandha* 五取蘊 *xǔ qǔ yùn*); they are "the processes which constitute human existence … which … we tend to identify with and grasp onto them as our 'self.' These are the aggregates of form [*rūpa* 色 *sè*], feeling [*vedanā* 受 *shòu*], apperception [*saṃjñā* 想 *xiǎng*], karmic formations or volitions [*saṃskāra* 行 *xíng*], and cognitive awareness or consciousness [*vijñāna* 識 *shì*]."[5]

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Tathāgatagarbha* is also called by many schools the Eighth Consciousness (*parijñāna*, 第八識 *dì bā shì*), implying the innermost, hidden faculty or consciousness in humankind. In order to understand this term, we first need to broadly define what "consciousness" means in Buddhism and how it originated.

The Sanskrit word *Vijñāna* (Pāli: *viññāṇa*) is defined as "consciousness-cum-spirit" by the online Digital Dictionary of Buddhism (DDB) and translated into Chinese as 識神 (*shì shén*) or 神識 (*shén shì*), having the senses of "mind, soul, consciousness. That which continues on after the death of the body." As annotation, the DDB also emphasizes the importance of this expression: "The presence of this term in translation texts of the third century has been analyzed as one of the most telling features of Buddhism in the south during that period. The same term also features in debates on the survival of death by the spirit 神不滅 [*shén bú miè*] in the fifth

[4] William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious: The Ālaya-Vijñāna in the Context of Indian Buddhist Thought*, RoutledgeCurzon Critical Studies in Buddhism (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 9. Waldron teaches South Asian religions and Buddhist philosophy as Professor of Religion at Middlebury College, VT.

[5] Waldron, 10.

and sixth century."[6] The Monier-Williams Sanskrit English Dictionary (SED) indicates the word as composing of the prefix "*vi*-" and the verbal root "*jñā*." The prefix has the meaning of "apart, asunder, in different directions, to and fro, about, away … It is esp. used as a prefix to verbs or nouns and other parts of speech derived from verbs, to express 'division,' 'distinction,' 'distribution,' 'arrangement,' 'order,' 'opposition,' or 'deliberation.'" The root, "*jñā*," means "to know, have knowledge … perceive, apprehend, understand," etc.[7] The prefix "*vi*-" is related to the Latin "*dis*-" and the root "*jñā*" is a cognate of γνῶσις in Greek, (*co*)*gnitio* in Latin, and *know* in English.[8] Together, the word *vijñāna* takes on the meaning of "the act of distinguishing or discerning, understanding, comprehending, recognizing, intelligence, knowledge."[9]

Another Sanskrit word *ālaya* often associated with *tathāgatagarbha*, is a noun composed of the prefix "*ā*" and the verbal root "*li*." The base verb means "to come close to; to settle down upon; to stoop, crouch." So, *ālaya* represents the meaning of "a house, dwelling; a receptacle, asylum" (SED, s.v. "Ā-laya"). Waldron asserts that the word "also retained an older sense from the early texts – whose nuances will resurface in due time – of 'clinging, attachment, or grasping.'"[10] Thus this innovative terminology, *Ālaya-Vijñāna*, in early Yogācāra literature, came to denote a "new kind of *vijñāna*, which dwells in or sticks to the material sense-faculties, [contrasting] with the traditional six types of 'manifest cognitive awareness' (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*)

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[6] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "識神" [Consciousness-cum-spirit], by Michael Radich and Charles Muller, last modified January 31, 2017, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?8b.xml+id(%27b8b58-795e%27). N.B., the Chinese word, 識 *shì*, connoting "consciousness," is unambiguous; but the other word, 神 *shén*, usually signifying "god/gods," should be taken as an abbreviation of "精神 *jīng shén*," or spirit as properly translated.

[7] Monier Monier-Williams, E. Leumann, and C. Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, new ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), s.v. "ज्ञा 1. jñā."

[8] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 20.

[9] Monier-Williams, Leumann, and Cappeller, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*, s.v. "Vi-jñāna".

[10] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 93.

insofar as they 'arise, come forth, manifest, issue, originate, occur, commence' (*pra-vṛt*, SED 693) in conjunction with objects impinging upon their respective sense-fields."[11, 12]

## Types of Cognitive Awarenesses

Six kinds of "manifest cognitive awareness" are traditionally recognized by Indian philosophy. In Buddhist terms, they belong to the so-called *pravṛtti-vijñāna*, which literally signifies "the (*samsaric*) process-consciousness" (轉識 *zhuǎn shì*). They consist of the five physical senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile) plus the reasoning mind (*manovijñāna* 意識 *yì shì*).[13,14,15] These senses and awareness are classified as "process," "karmic," "evolving," or "transforming" because they will be extinguished after a person departs this world. Yet, they do not disappear without a trace, since any agitation of the human existence will leave its consequence for subsequent times or lives, in conformity with the laws of karma and *saṃsāra*.

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[11] "'Yogācāra' literally means 'the practice of yoga'. But the school goes by several other names as well: 'Vijñānavāda', 'Cittamātra' and 'Vijñaptimātra'. The first of these means 'the doctrine of consciousness' (the fifth of the five *skandhas*), the second means 'consciousness only' (*citta* and *vijñāna* are synonyms), and the third means 'impressions-only'. … the '-only' in the last two names suggests that this school holds that nothing exists other than mental things … that Yogacara is a form of idealism. And that is indeed the central claim of Yogācāra. … the higher stages of meditation involve focused awareness of purely mental objects. Since meditation is recognized as playing a key role in attaining enlightenment, perhaps it seemed to some meditation-masters that the ignorance that must be overcome to attain nirvana has to do with our belief in things existing independent of consciousness, physical things. … if we could come to see the world as only impressions, then the temporary surcease from suffering that is attained in meditational trance states could be extended to our daily lives." Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction*, Ashgate World Philosophies Series (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 147. Siderits (1946–) was Professor of philosophy at Seoul National University, Korea before retiring in 2012.

[12] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 93.

[13] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "五識" [Five consciousnesses], by Charles Muller, last modified August 5, 2009, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e94-8b58%27).

[14] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "六識" [Six consciousnesses], by Charles Muller, last modified September 17, 2007, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?51.xml+id(%27b516d-8b58%27).

[15] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "轉識" [Forthcoming consciousness(es)], by Charles Muller, last modified June 8, 2021, http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E8%BD%89%E8%AD%98.

Because the six cognitive consciousnesses vanish at the end of one's present lifetime, the problem arose as to how their karmic consequences can be conveyed to the next life. This dilemma was creatively and effectively confronted by the Yogācāra school in its innovation of the notion of *Ālaya-Vijñāna*, the storehouse consciousness. The half-siblings, Asaṅga (無著 *Wú Zhù*) and Vasubundhu (世親 *Shì Qīn*), ca. 4th to 5th century CE, usually regarded as among the founders of the school, were the first Yogācāra teachers to mention this new consciousness. It was postulated that the *Ālaya-Vijñāna* serves as a basal consciousness that synchronically underlies all the other six kinds of awareness, emitting past karmic influences and, simultaneously, collecting existing karmic seeds, like a storehouse. In its essence, *vijñāna* as such is divided into two classes: the first six as "cognitive awareness," and the seventh as "consciousness," with the latter being "an underlying sentience which flows in an unbroken stream of mind throughout multiple lifetimes, while the [former] refers to … six modalities of cognitive awareness which momentarily arise in conjunction with discrete cognitive objects."[16]

In between the six cognitive awarenesses and Ālaya-Vijñāna, Asaṅga also added another consciousness, called *kliṣṭamanas* ("afflicted mentality" 染末那/末那識 *rǎn muò nà/muò nà shì*), a compound word composed of *kliṣṭa* (past participle of *kliś*, "to torment, trouble, molest, cause pain, afflict," SED, s.v. "kliś") and *manas*. The latter originally designates a wide range of meanings: "mind (in its widest sense as applied to all the mental powers), intellect, intelligence, understanding, perception, sense, conscience, will" (SED, s.v. "mánas"). This term was adapted to denote the mistaken identity of *Ālaya-Vijñāna* as the true self (*ātmán*), "a form of ignorance and self-grasping that was thought to so continuously and subliminally arise that it too came to

[16] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 12.

be considered a distinctive mental process, called 'afflictive mentation' 染污意 (*kliṣṭa-manas*) … with the *ālayavijñāna* as the eighth 第八識."[17]

Some Yogâcārins, such as Paramārtha (真諦 Zhēndì, 499-569, who translated the *Buddha Nature Treatise* into Chinese), considers the *Ālaya-Vijñāna* to be bound by defilements permanently with no possibility of extricating itself from the mire, and thus should be extinguished prior to attaining nirvana. For example, in the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* (瑜伽師地論, 十七地論, or 瑜伽論), the supplementary section, *Viniścayasaṃgrahaṇī* (Compendium of Ascertainment), states that:

> Because *ālaya-vijñāna* is the constituent element (*dhātukatva*) of all the kinds of karmic formations (*saṃskārā* 行 *xíng*) comprised in proliferation (*prapañca*), [the practitioner] makes [them] into one collection, one heap, one hoard in the *ālaya-vijñāna*. Having collected [them all] into one, he revolves the basis {*āśraya parāvṛtti* 轉依 *zhuǎn yī*} [i.e. *ālaya-vijñāna*] by the cause of assiduous cultivation of the wisdom (*jñāna*) which takes true reality (*tathatā* 真如 *zhēn jú*) as an objective support. As the basis is revolved, *ālaya-vijñāna* must be said to have been abandoned (*prahīṇa* 消 *xiāo*); because it has been abandoned, it must be said that all the defilements also have been abandoned.[18]
>
> 以阿賴耶識是一切戲論所攝諸行界故。略彼諸行。於阿賴耶識中總為一團一積一聚。為一聚已由緣真如境智。修習多修習故而得轉依。轉依無間當言已斷阿賴耶識。由此斷故當言已斷一切雜染。(T30n1579_p0581c03-08).[19]

The transformation or revolving of the basis (*āśrayaparāvṛtti* 轉依 *zhuǎn yī*) is also called "fundamental transmutation." It is an important soteriological concept in the Yogācāra school, defined as: "the transmutation of the defiled state in which one has not abandoned the

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[17] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "阿賴耶識" [Ālayavijñāna], by Charles Muller, last modified November 27, 2020, http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E9%98%BF%E8%B3%B4%E8%80%B6%E8%AD%98.

[18] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 187, (5.b)C.1. Chinese translation added.

[19] "CBETA 線上閱讀," Chinese Buddhist Scripture Repository, 2021, https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw. Unless otherwise noted, all Chinese quotes of the *Tipiṭaka* are taken from the online database of Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts. Alpha-numeric codes at the end of the quote indicate the unique line numbers assigned to the quoted range of texts by the web site. The prefix "T" indicates "Taishō Tripiṭaka (大正新脩大藏經 Dàzhèng Xīnxīu Dàzàngjīng)."

afflictions (*kleśa* [煩惱 *fán nǎo*]) into a purified state in which the *kleśas* have been abandoned. This transmutation thus transforms an ordinary person (*pṛthagjana* [凡夫人 *fán fū rén*]) into a noble one (*ārya* [聖人 *shèng rén*])."[20] According to the *Yogācārabhūmi*, this abandonment of *Ālaya-Vijñāna* is accomplished through the gaining of wisdom cultivated with arduous effort so as to see the true reality of *tathātā*. Furthermore, the *Śāstra* proclaims that the transmutation of the basis "impedes (*virodha* [相違 *xiāng wéi*]) and so counteracts (*pratipakṣa* [對治 *duè zhì*]) *ālaya-vijñāna*."[21] Waldron further explains this notion:

> This closely follows Hsüan Tsang's [玄奘] Chinese. … Throughout this short section [(5.b)C.2.], Paramārtha … has consistently translated *aśraya-parivṛtti* [轉依 *zhuǎn yī*], the revolution of the basis, as *amala-vijñāna* [如來識 *rú lái shì*, 淨識 *jìng shì*, 無垢識 *wú gò shì*, 無漏識 *wú lò shì*, 第九識 *dì jiǒ shì*], "pure-consciousness." The term *aśraya-parivṛtti* is one of the central terms in Yogācāra soteriology. The *aśraya* [所依 *suǒ yī*], the basis or support, refers to *ālaya-vijñāna* and its transformation or revolution is understood here as the transformation of the very basis of personal existence, from afflicted self-centeredness to the state of perfect enlightenment and wisdom.[22]

Therefore, the original Indian Yogācāra philosophies considered the *ālaya-vijñāna* either polluted, in need of serious transformation, or totally corrupt that it needs to be completely abandoned and substituted with a new, ninth consciousness – the *amala-vijñāna*. As we will see later, this doctrine was not very well accepted when Buddhism was transmitted to China. Instead, the *tathāgatagarbha* theory, also originated in India, was popularized and indigenized in China and later spread to most parts of East Asia.

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[20] Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), s.v. "Āśrayaparāvṛtti." Added Chinese translation in brackets.

[21] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 188, (5.b)C.2. Chinese translation added.

[22] Waldron, 245–46, endnote 37. Chinese translation added.

## Transmission of Yogācāra Consciousness into China

Hsüan Tsang [or Xuán Zàng 玄奘, 602-664], arguably the most celebrated Chinese pilgrim to India, was a devout monk who travelled through the treacherous terrains of central Asia in order to find authentic Buddhism in India, her original birthplace. While in India, he set foot on many temples and holy sites that are scattered across the subcontinent. But his main place of stay was the Nālandā Monastery, under the headship of its abbot, Śīlabhadra (529–645), respectfully called the Right Dharma Keeper by his disciples. He was proclaimed to be "the most eminent of the disciples of Dharmapāla [護法 Hù Fǎ, 530–561], at only thirty years of age …."[23] According to the Chinese biography (more like a hagiography) by Huil-Li, Xuán Zàng's arrival was foretold by three bodhisattvas to the abbot in a vision three years in advance. At this monastery, Śīlabhadra followed the instruction of the bodhisattvas and taught Xuán Zàng the *Yogācārabhūmi-Śāstra* (lit. Stages of Yogācāra).[24]

Xuán Zàng studied and travelled in India for seventeen years [T50n2060_p0456b13] from 629 to 645, conquering various Indian languages, and learning under various Buddhist masters, but especially Śīlabhadra, the Yogācāra master. Xuán Zàng brought 657 Indian manuscripts back to China [T50n2060_p0456b18-19], of which he personally translated 75 scriptures, having obtaining fervent support from the imperial palace of the Tang dynasty.[25] He succeeded to establish himself as one of, if not *the* most unique and important translator in the

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[23] Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, 629–645 A.D.*, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and S. W. Bushell, Oriental Translation Fund, New Series 15 (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1905), 2:109. Watters (1840–1901) was an Oriental scholar, and served as Acting Consul General in Korea, Guangdong, China, and then Consul in Fuzhou, China.

[24] Hui-Li, ed., *The Life of Hsuan-Tsang: The Tripitaka-Master of the Great Tzu En Monastery*, trans. Li Yung-Hsi (Peking, China: The Chinese Buddhist Association, 1959), 102–4.

[25] Jungnok Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies Monographs (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2012), 14. Park (1971–2008) was a Buddhist monk who wrote this book as his dissertation for D.Phil at Oxford University.

history of transmission of Indian Buddhist texts into China, having single-handedly and concurrently recited and translated these texts. But the work was also the rigorous, systematic result of committees of "other experts on Buddhism, as well as experts on other areas of Chinese literature, philosophy, history, etc. This system of cooperative translation made it possible for an exotic religion to reach the minds of Chinese people."[26]

One particularly important work of Xuán Zàng became the foundation of the Chinese Yogācāra school, called Fǎ Xiàng (法相, lit. Dharma Characteristics). This treatise, the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi Śāstra* (成唯識論 *Chéng Wéi Shì Luèn*, lit. "*Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*"), from the onset states its purpose unequivocally as the elimination of delusions on the reality of the self and the material world:

> Vasubandhu wrote the *Trimsika* (*Thirty Stanzas*) for those who misunderstood or made nothing of the Doctrine of the two Sunyatas or Voids, in order that they might acquire a correct understanding of it. A correct understanding of this doctrine is essential if one is to cut off the two heavy *avaranas* or barriers [i.e., (a) *klesavarana*, the barrier of vexing passions which obstructs one's way to Nirvana or true deliverance, and (b) *jneyavarana*, which impedes Mahabodhi or Supreme Enlightenment]. Both these *avaranas* are due to a belief in the subjective existence of the Atman or individual ego (*atmagraha*, Atman-clinging) and to a belief in the objective existence of dharmas or external things (*dharmagraha*, dharma-clinging). If the two Sunyatas are realized, both barriers will be lifted. The sundering of the two barriers has for excellent fruits the attainments of true deliverance or Nirvana and of Supreme Enlightenment or Mahabodhi. The former is the result of cutting away the barrier of vexing passions which cause rebirth, while the latter is the result of cutting away the barrier which hinders Absolute Knowledge.[27]

The emphasis on the sole role of consciousness has inevitably engendered the evaluation that Yogācāra is opposed to the *śūnyavāda* (the doctrine of emptiness – all is void, even

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[26] Park, 16–17.

[27] Dharmapāla and Nine Other Śāstra Masters, "Vijnaptimatratasiddhi Sastra Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun , 成唯識論 or The Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only," trans. Hsuan Tsang (玄奘) and Wei Tat (韋達), accessed March 17, 2022, http://www.dhalbi.org/publ/journ1/wt_j1.pdf.

emptiness itself) from Nāgārjuna's (c. 150-250) Mādhyamika (Middle Way) teaching.[28] "Like the Mādhyamika, Yogācāra thought denies the reality of the phenomenal world, but it accepts the reality of the consciousness that produces it. It is from this doctrine that the school derives its alternate name, Vijñānavāda [the doctrine of consciousness], the doctrine that all existences are the creation of consciousness."[29] More recently, however, scholars such as Sallie B. King began to theorize that the two schools are actually complementary to each other. They both share the same basis of *śūnyatā*, to be sure; but the Yogācāra masters did not appreciate the Mādhyamika manner of complete negativity; rather, they considered the latter's teaching to be a common form of Buddhist *upāya* [expedient means, 方便 *fāng biàn*], and therefore cannot be the complete truth on *śūnyatā*. King asserts that "even today one can read Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* and debate forever about whether, for Nāgārjuna, Buddhist practice gives access to reality As It Is. The *Kārikā* themselves give us no basis for deciding yes or no." Although this ambiguity is an indication of perfection in the literary sense, the Yogācārins thought it not practical for most practitioners. Being pragmatists, as the name of the school implies, they emphasized the affirmation of "the existential and spiritual benefits that resulted from the practice of their disciplines." Therefore, they adopted such terms as *tathātā* (thusness, 真如 *zēn rú*) and *yathābhutā* (reality As It Is, 如實知見 *rú shí zhī jiàn*) to denote "the experiential fulfillment of emptiness" instead of the negation of śūnyatā.[30]

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[28] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, October 14, 2011, s.v. "Mādhyamika," https://web.archive.org/web/20211106163247/https://www.britannica.com/topic/Madhyamika. "Middle way" refers to the position between realism (represented by the Sarvāstivāda school – all is real) and idealism (represented by the Yogācāra school – consciousness only).

[29] Nakamura Hajime, "Mahayana Buddhism," in *Buddhism and Asian History*, ed. Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings, Religion, History, and Culture: Readings from the Encyclopedia of Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 231.

[30] King, *Buddha Nature*, 11.

Xuán Zàng's Chinese Yogācāra school of Fǎ Xiàng, largely based on his translations of Dharmapāla's writings, may be classified as Idealism proper. It enjoyed a brief popularity in China and later influenced East Asian Buddhism, to an extent that Yogācāra in general is often conceived of as purely idealistic, which is a misconception since there are other branches of Yogācāra (notably, that of Paramārtha) that seem to conflate "consciousness-only" with "Tathāgatagarbha."[31] There are also some syncretic scriptures, such as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Awakening of Faith* [大乘起信論 *Dà Shèng Qǐ Xìn Luèn*], that "are better known for amalgamating the Yogācāra concept of *ālaya-vijñāna*, the 'storehouse consciousness,' and the *Tathāgatagarbha*."[32] However, as idealism, Fǎ Xiàng intrinsically shuns the concept of *Tathāgatagarbha* in favor of the *gotra* ("a lineage segment within an Indian caste," 種性 *zhǒng xìng*) supposition.[33] It argues that each existing being belongs to one of the five *gotras* – *Tathāgata* (如來 *rú lái*), *pratyekabuddha*, *arhat*, worldly rebirth (*icchantika* or *ātyantika*), and undefined; these *gotras* determine the possibilities for how high the spiritual attainment can be reached in each class of being, along with the characteristics of their rebirths.[34] Such pre-destination, if we can call it that, is carried out through the *bija* (seeds) stored in Ālaya-Vijñāna.[35] Influential as the Fǎ Xiàng School was in East Asian Buddhism, the popularity of this kind of fatalism could not last long in the pragmatist Chinese philosophical milieu. The school's "affirmation of the *icchantika* doctrine and rejection of universal Buddhahood" rendered it

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[31] King, 9.

[32] King, 20.

[33] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, April 3, 2013, s.v. "Gotra," https://www.britannica.com/topic/gotra.

[34] "緣覺 *yuán jué* / 獨覺 *dú jué*; "individually enlightened one" or "solitary buddha"; an *arhat* who becomes enlightened through his own efforts without receiving instruction from a buddha in his final lifetime. Unlike the 'perfectly enlightened buddhas' (*Samyaksaṃbuddha*), the *pratyekabuddha* refrains from teaching others about his experience because he has neglected to develop the same degree of great compassion (*mahākarunā* 大悲 *dà bēi*) that motivates the *Samyaksaṃbuddha*." Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. "Pratyekabuddha."

[35] King, *Buddha Nature*, 18.

subpar in the minds of Chinese Buddhist intellectuals. Under such circumstances, it gradually receded to the background amidst other burgeoning Buddhist schools.[36]

As a summary, consciousness is both a critical innovation and a subject of supreme importance for the Yogācārins, both in its original Indian source and also in its Chinese variation. In the fourth- to sixth-century philosophical Buddhist debates in India, the Yogācāra school perpetuated the concept of Ālaya-Vijñāna, viewed by many scholars as "the most comprehensive and systematic of the many innovative ideas proffered within the intellectual milieu" of the time.[37] In Paramārtha's Yogācāra system, the *Amala-Vijñāna*, rather than *Ālaya-Vijñāna*, would be the goal of *nirvana* or *mokṣa* (解脫 *jiě tuō*, liberation from *saṃsāra*), while in Fǎ Xiàng Yogācāra, a person's ability to become enlightened as a buddha is pre-determined by the seeds in Ālaya-Vijñāna. Although this "store consciousness" is somewhat associated with *Tathāgatagarbha*, the latter does not occupy a prominent position in the overall Yogācāra discourse.

## *The Self in Buddhism*

### In Early Buddhism

The concept of the "self," whether in its positive aspect (as in *Ātmán* being *Brahman* in Advaita Vedanta) or negative manifestation (as in *anātman* in Buddhism), occupies an eminent position in Indian philosophies and religions.[38] Indian philosophers consider *ātmán* as "one of the most basic concepts" that signifies "the universal self, identical with the eternal core of the

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[36] King, 2.

[37] Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 92.

[38] New World Encyclopedia Contributors, New World Encyclopedia, s.v. "Atman," accessed March 22, 2022, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Atman.

personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attains release (*moksha*) from the bonds of existence."[39] In modern Buddhist studies, however, scholars tend to avoid using the word *self* positively, in conformance with the *anātman* (non-self) doctrine prevailing in Buddhism. This attitude originates from the good intention of the writers to remind their audience the teaching of absence of an enduring self. The drawback, though, is the impression engendered that Buddhism is completely devoid of the conception of "self." In Jungnok Park's analysis, Indian Buddhists did create their own doctrine of *non-permanent* self.[40]

"Self" is of paramount import in Buddhism due to not only the Buddhist apologetic stance against the traditional Indian notion of *Ātmán* in Brahmanism, but also its close association with soteriology. "One peculiar characteristic of the concept of self in Buddhism is that understanding self as it is (*yathā-bhūta* [如實 *rú shí*]) may well be regarded as equal to the complete soteriological practice in Buddhism: when one understands how a living being comes into being and how it stops coming into being, one reaches the destination of Buddhist soteriology." In the incipiency of Buddhism, "self" is a notion with three particular characteristics – (1) it exists in *saṃsāra*, being bound by the karmic law; (2) it is impermanent, consisting of impermanent constituents; and (3) its constituents are made up according to certain conditions.[41] Karma acts as a perfunctory mechanism that produces consequences based on the input of prior behaviors, whether good, neutral, or evil. The Buddha defined it simply as "intention/volition (*cetanā*, 思 *sī*)": "Intention, I tell you, is *kamma* (Pali for karma). Intending,

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[39] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. "Atman," accessed March 22, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/topic/atman.

[40] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 65.

[41] Park, 65–66.

one does *kamma* by way of body, speech, & intellect."[42] In Chinese translation of the Pali *Aṅguttaranikāya* (增支部經典): "諸比丘！我說思業，思已而以身、語、意造業。" (N22n0007_p0149a14). Karma is thus strongly associated with morality and retributive justice.

Paradoxically, this *self* that continues indefinitely through countless cycles of birth and death cannot be a permanent entity in the early Buddhist theorization, because permanency in Indian philosophy carries the customary and necessary implication of immutability, a most egregious violation of the basic Buddhist proposition that all dharmas, humans included, are in the process of constant change.[43] Particularly, as mentioned earlier, the Buddhist self is thought of as constituted by the five aggregates (*skandhas* 蘊 *yùn*): "Throughout the major Nikāyas, we find this proposition prevailing: nothing more than the five aggregates is to be regarded as a self." Since all of the *skandhas* are impermanent, it was reasoned that the *ātmán* is likewise of the same nature.[44] Such logic is called by Park, "early Buddhist reductionism," because the properties of the integral whole is reduced to those of its components.[45] This theory on the lack of a permanent self is further reinforced by the doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda* 緣起 *yuán qǐ*) in postulating the process by which one's body, mind, and speech – and *not* any permanent entity or agent – produce or obliterate the source of suffering.[46]

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[42] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., "Nibbedhika Sutta: Penetrative (AN 6.63)," Access to Insight. BCBS ed., November 30, 2013, 5, https://web.archive.org/web/20220115224051/https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an06/an06.063.than.html.

[43] Bruce R. Reichenbach, *The Law of Karma: A Philosophical Study* (London: Macmillan Academic & Professional, 1990), 125, https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-349-11899-1. Reichenbach is a professor of philosophy at Augsburg College in Minnesota. Since incipiency, Buddhism has defined reality as "composed of 'an unceasing flow of simple ultimates, called "dharmas", which can be defined as (1) multiple, (2) momentary, (3) impersonal, (4) mutually conditioned events'."

[44] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 69–70.

[45] Park, 97.

[46] Park, 73.

Early Indian Buddhists inherited the word *ātmán* from the *Upaniṣads* to denote the concept of *self*, while denying the notion of a permanent agent therein. This latter view, called *śāśvatavāda* (eternalism) is considered as extreme as its opposite end, *ucchedavāda* (nihilism). Thus Buddhists regarded themselves as upholding the *middle way*, which was systemized by Nāgārjuna in his magnum opus, *Madhyamaka-kārikā*.[47] Then, what does *ātmán* originally mean? In Oldenberg's analysis, "the basic meaning of Ātmán is 'breath'; the Indian word goes etymologically with the German word Atem. … It is evident how the Ātmán is assigned a role to be a wind-like breath belonging to and inherent in an individual being. … breath appears to be the bearer of life, and as such, the existence of a person is based on it."[48] Thus *ātmán* took on the meaning of a self, and became reified, even eternalized, in the *Upaniṣads*, which was commonly accepted in the pre-Buddhist Indic cultural milieu. Instead of the less significant and less popular view of nihilism, the substantial view of Upaniṣadic *ātmán*, later identified with the Creator, Brahman, became the major competitor of Buddhism and prompted the latter's strong reaction in the form of the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*.[49]

## Later Developments

It was the Yogācārins that systematically expounded the doctrine of Consciousness-Only, resulting in its firm establishment in the school after the publication of such works as the *vijñaptimātratā* (consciousness only) treatises written by Vasubandhu, especially his *Vimśatikā* (Twenty Verses on Consciousness Only, 唯識二十論 *Wéi Shì Èr Shí Luèn*) and the *Triṃśikā*

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[47] Park, 117.

[48] Hermann Oldenberg, *The Doctrine of the Upaniṣads and the Early Buddhism*, trans. Shridhar B. Shrotri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 33. Oldenberg (1854–1920) was a German Sanskritist, Buddhologist, and historian of religions and served as professor at the University of Kiel and then at Göttingen.

[49] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 83–84.

(Thirty Verses on Consciousness Only 唯識三十論 *Wéi Shì Sān Shí Luèn*).[50] The latter was the basis of *Awakening of Faith* (*大乘起信論 Dà Shèng Qǐ Xìn Luèn* translated into Chinese and commented by Xuán Zàng), a monumental treatise for the Chinese Yogācāra school. These representative works have long been deemed to assert the position, epistemologically, "that mind, or consciousness, does not – at least not directly – perceive or cognize anything outside itself, but rather cognizes only its own image of an object," and ontologically, "that there are no entities, especially no material entities, apart from consciousness, or, more precisely, apart from the various kinds of mind (*citta*) and mental factors or mind-associates (*caitta*)."[51]

More recently, however, Western scholars begin to reconsider the *vijñaptimātratā* stance of Yogācāra, especially the ontological aspect, for the reason that (1) earlier scriptures, such as the *Yogācārabhūmi* and the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, scarcely contain such notions, and (2) even the above works of Vasubandhu and Xuán Zàng "are stated not to deny an independent existence of material things (*rūpa*), or of the so-called external (i.e. the physical) world."[52] Lusthaus agrees with such assessment and states:

> … the Western philosophies are designed to afford the best possible access to an ontological realm (at least sufficient to acknowledge its existence), while Yogācāra is critical of that motive in all its manifestations. To the extent that epistemological idealists can also be critical realists, Yogācāra may be deemed a type of epistemological idealism, with the proviso that the purpose of its arguments was not to engender an improved ontological theory or commitment, but rather an insistence that we pay the fullest attention to the epistemological and

[50] Park, 121.

[51] Schmithausen Lambert, "On the Problem of the External World in the Ch'eng wei shih lun.," *Studia Philologica Buddhica*, Occasional Paper Series, XIII (February 2, 2015): 9, https://icabs.repo.nii.ac.jp/index.php?active_action=repository_view_main_item_detail&page_id=13&block_id=17&item_id=341&item_no=1. Schmithausen (1939–) was an associate professor of Indology at the University of Münster and then at the University of Hamburg.

[52] Schmithausen, 9–11.

> psychological conditions compelling us to construct and attach to ontological theories.[53]

For the Yogācārins, the main factors of sufferings and rebirth – ignorance and craving – are attributed or "mapped" to the mind simply for the "therapeutic value" of "dismantling" these mind functions. After serving such purpose to achieve enlightenment, these "maps" also need to be discarded – a process mentioned earlier as "overturning the Cognitive Basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*)" – to transform "the basic mode of cognition from consciousness (*vi-jñāna*, discernment) into *jñāna* (direct knowing)."[54] On the one hand, Lusthaus concurs with the Yogācāra rejection of the reality of external objects (外相 *wài xiàng*) as being a problematic "necessary condition for appropriation."[55] On the other, he appears to affirm the reality of the physical world:

> Does Yogācāra actually confirm rūpa to be 'real'? In an earlier section while determining which of the three (non-) self-natures were 'real' and which only nominal, the *Ch'eng wei-shih lun* says: 'Mind (citta), mental-associates (caittas) and rūpa, since they arise from conditions, are considered to be real existents (為實有 *wei shih yu*). If there were no real dharmas, there would be no prajñaptic dharmas either, since the prajñaptic (*chia* 假) depends on a real cause, viz. prajñapti (*shih-she* 施設 [假名, nominally established]).' Thus rūpa, because it operates causally, is real.[56]

Thus, Schmithousen observes that "Lusthaus seems to admit that Yogācāras reject the externality of objects … but he insists on some kind of 'real' existence of matter (*rūpa*, 色), which is independent from mind in the same way that other persons' or sentient beings' minds

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[53] Dan Lusthaus, *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-Shih Lun*, reprint ed., Curzon Critical Studies in Buddhism (Abingdon, UK: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 536. Lusthaus serves as Chinese Buddhism review editor for the Buddhism list at Harvard University, and is also an Advisory Board Member for H-Buddhism.

[54] Lusthaus, 537.

[55] Lusthaus, 484.

[56] Lusthaus, 512.

exist independently from one's own mind."[57] But, Schmithousen eventually quotes passages from the *Chéng Wéi Shì Luèn* to refute Lusthaus' assertion of the reality of matter or mind.

In general, the *self* in the Yogācāra sense is composed of "momentary consciousnesses and other mental factors that continue in succession (*saṃtati* [相續 *xiāng xù*])." *Ālaya-Vijñāna* displays or creates other consciousnesses and images of the external phenomenal world using the stored seeds. It is situated within the common Buddhist conception of *saṃsāra*. What is unique in the Yogācāra school is that this *self* never ceases its active continuation, even after *parinirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇa* without remainder). "While the Buddhas in other Buddhist doctrinal systems are depicted as not possessing any bodily and mental bases after *nirvāṇa*, the Yogācāra Buddhas are said to transform consciousness into transcendental knowledge (*lokôttara-jñāna* [出世間智 *chū shì jiēn zhì*]). This special *nirvāṇa* is called the *nirvāṇa* without abiding (*apratisthita-nirvāṇa* [無住處涅槃 *wú zhù chù niè pán*])."[58] The fully enlightened one remains in *nirvāṇa* without abiding, while fulfilling the salvific responsibility to enlighten the world incessantly; this paradoxical double existence is explained by Yogācāra that a buddha possesses a *trisvabhāva* (three self-natures or threefold body, 三自性 *sān zì xìn*) and four *jñāna*s (knowledges):

> The four knowledges are the transformation of bases (*āśrayaparāvṛtti* [轉依 *zhuǎn yī*]), i.e., the purified modes of the eight consciousnesses of ordinary beings: store-consciousness is refined into mirror-knowledge (*ādarśajñāna* [鏡智 *jìng zhì*]), the seventh into equality-knowledge (*samatājñāna* [平等智 *píng děng zhì*]), the sixth into examination-knowledge (*pratyakṣajñāna* [觀智 *guān zhì*]), and the first five into administration-knowledge (*kṛtyānuṣṭhānajñāna* [作事智 *zuò shì zhì*]). [The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* 大乘莊嚴經論 *Dà Shèng Zhuāng Yán Jīng Luèn*] identifies the first two knowledges as *dharma*-body (*dharma-kāya* [法身 *fǎ shēn*]), the third as enjoyment-body (*saṃbhogika-kāya* [食身 *shí shēn*/受用

[57] Schmithausen, “On the Problem of the External World in the Ch’eng wei shih lun.,” 12.
[58] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 125.

> 身 *shò yòng shēn*]), and the fourth as creation-body (*nairmāṇika-kāya* [化身 *huà shēn*]). … the *svābhāvika*-body [自性身 *zì xìng shēn*] (i.e., *dharma*-body) is permanent (*nitya* [常 *cháng*]) by nature (*prakṛti* [本性 *běn xìng*/自性 *zì xìng*]), the enjoyment-body is in consecutive existence without interruption (*aviccheda* [無斷絕 *wú duàn jué*]), and the creation-body is repeatedly (*punaḥ punar* [還復 *huán fù*]) created.[59]

The corresponding passages in the Taishō *Tripiṭaka* database, in《大乘莊嚴經論 *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra-kārikā*》, are the following:

> 釋曰：一切諸佛有三種身。一者自性身，由轉依相故。二者食身，由於大集眾中作法食故。三者化身，由作所化眾生利益故。此中應知，自性身為食身、化身依止，由是本故。(T31n1604_p0606b09-12).

> 復次一切諸佛悉同常住，由自性常故，一切諸佛自性身常住，畢竟無漏故。由無間常故，一切諸佛食身常住，說法無斷絕故。由相續常故，一切諸佛化身常住，雖於此滅復彼現故。(T31n1604_p0606c17-21).

> 釋曰：四智鏡不動三智之所依者，一切諸佛 有四種智：一者鏡智、二者平等智、三者觀智、四者作事智。彼鏡智以不動為相，恒為餘三智之所依止。何以故？三智動故。八七六五識次第轉得故者，轉第八識得鏡智，轉第七識得平等智，轉第六識得觀智，轉前五識得作事智，是義應知。(T31n1604_p0606c25-7a02).

Early Buddhists held that the fully awakened Śākyamuni before *parinirvāṇa* was still subject to physical sufferings, and only achieved complete *mokṣa* or emancipation afterwards. The Yogācāra school led the Mahāyānists to defy such "pessimism" by positing that with the three bodies, buddhas in reality never enter death; they are just liberated from the incessant cycles of *saṃsāra*, in order to fulfill their mission to teach salvation to the world. In so formulating, the Yogācārins demolished "the distinction between what is conditioned (therefore productive) and what is unconditioned (therefore unproductive)."[60]

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[59] Park, 135–36. Chinese added.

[60] Park, 136–38. Note: Dharmas or things occur in two main categories: unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) dharmas and conditioned (*saṃskṛta* 有爲法) dharmas. The *asaṃskṛtas*, not formed by causes, are unproduced (*utpada*), without extinction (*vyaya*), and without duration-change (*sthityanyathatva*). Taken from https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/asamskrita

## "Self" in Chinese Buddhism

In J. Park's opinion, the problem that the first Chinese Buddhists faced was the opposite end of the spectrum – nihilism – rather than the perennial eternalism confronted by their Indic counterpart. He describes the pre-Buddhist philosophical milieu in China as materialistic: "Before the arrival of Buddhism, the Chinese believed neither in *saṃsāra* nor in a permanent self. The mainstream philosophers who influenced the later debates opposed to Buddhism were, in a sense, materialists: the mind is made of *qì* (氣 pristine material or vital energy)." And *qì* is one of the three elemental components (精 *jīng* "essence", 氣 *qì* "breath", 神 *shén* "spirit") in Daoism. This Daoist association is affirmed by Park: "As for the Chinese concept of self before the arrival of Buddhism, one of its most conspicuous characteristics is that a self was considered in relationship with dào (道 way), the principle or power that creates and administers the universe in an ethico-cosmogonic sense."[61] However, he might have conflicted himself in his assessment of the Chinese nihilistic view, since in subsequent chapters, he elaborates on the interpolation that Chinese translators inserted into the original Buddhist texts during the linguistic conversion process, using "Chinese terms indicating an imperishable soul, such as *húnpò* 魂魄 *shénshì* 神識 and *jīngshén* 精神."[62] If the Chinese had been primarily nihilists before the arrival of Buddhism, why would they have had such strong tendency to interpret foreign imported texts to exhibit their inclination toward a permanent soul that remains after death? It would appear that, if not wholehearted eternalists, at least they were partially bent on the imperishability of the human essence.

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[61] Park, 151.

[62] Park, 177.

In spite of the apparent self-contradiction, Park does meticulously and systematically outline the process by which the ancient Chinese introduced their own preconception of the self into the translations. Specifically, he identifies seven Chinese compound nouns that play the important role of the soul-self: (1) 魂魄 *huén può* – "may signify … 'an abiding agent that controls the process of thought'; (2) 魂靈 *huén líng* – "in most cases indicates a soul going through *saṃsāra*"; (3) 魂神 *huén shén* – " almost exclusively indicates an agent in *saṃsāra*"; (4) 精神 *jīng shén* – "frequently been used in philosophical Daoist texts as a technical term to indicate the mental agent of thought or the quintessence of the mind"; (5) 識神 *shì shén* – "Given that *shì* alone has been the standard rendering of *vijñāna* from the beginning of Buddhist translation, this implies that the Chinese Buddhists who assumed the existence of an imperishable soul thought that *vijñāna* was the entity to be signified by the Chinese term *shén*"; (6) 神識 *shén shì* – the reverse combination of [5] above, "the two combinations indeed designate the same object, the agent of thought and/or the agent in *saṃsāra*"; and (7) 魂識 *huén shì* – "Since *huén* is synonymous with *shén*, *huén shì* is also synonymous with *shén shì* [6] or *shì shén* [5]. Hence, … it is also used as a rendering for *vijñāna*."[63]

Chinese Buddhists adapted the Daoist concept of 神 *shén* as an imperishable entity, chiefly for the illustration of the Buddhist doctrine of *saṃsāra*.

> As an agent in *saṃsāra*, *shén* exists permanently, both in the conventional sense (*saṃvṛti* [世俗諦 *shì sú dì*]) and in the highest sense (*paramārtha* [勝義諦 *shèn yì dì*]). In the conventional sense, it is regarded as the essence of the mind, popularly named *huén può* 魂魄that goes through *saṃsāra*. The great majority of the interpolations and adaptations indicating an agent in *saṃsāra* at the canonical level are used in this sense. In the highest sense, *shén* is frequently identified with *tathāgatagarbha*. Hence it is said: "The substratum (ti 體) of nirvana is dharma-body. Investigating this dharma-body, [we find that] it is not a very different

[63] Park, 186–93.

> thing. The bright [manifestation of] *shén* 神明 in the past becomes *dharma*-body now. As the bright [manifestation of] *shén* has been the substratum of endless life and death, the *dharma*-body is also the substratum of all the merit of *nirvana*." (涅槃體者，法身是也。尋此法身，更非遠物。即昔神明，成今法身。神明既是生死萬累之體。法身亦是涅槃萬德之體。From 《大乘玄論 *Treatise on the Mystery of Mahāyāna*》T45n1853_p0046b16-18).[64]

In this way, the Chinese had a different approach than the Indian Yogācāra school in solving the problem of continuance through *saṃsāra*. Further expanding the capacity and domain of *shén*, the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* 寶藏論 (*Treatise of the Treasure*, commonly attributed to Sēng Zhào 僧肇, c. 384-414) equates *shén* to the Truth (真 *zēn*), and elevates it to the status of the eternal creator:

> 夫真也者，無洲無渚，無伴無侶，無涯無際，無處無所，能為萬物之祖宗。…能為三界之根門。… 有用曰神，有形曰身，無為曰道，無相曰真。應物而號，隨物而造，常住常存，不生不老。… 事雖無窮，理終一道。無有證者，無有得者。(T45n1857_p0143c15-22).
>
> (Translation) The Truth is without continents, companions, borders, or abodes; [thus] it can be the progenitor of all things … it can be the entry way of faculties (根門 *gēn mén*, *indriya*) of the threefold universe (三界 *sān jiè*, *trailokya* or *traidhātuka*).[65, 66] … Having functions/operations, it is call *shén*; having shapes, it is called body; being passive (無為 *wú wéi*, *asaṃskṛta* – unconditioned), it is called *dào*; having no characteristics, it is called truth. According to circumstances, it is entitled; according to objects, it creates; it abides forever, is unborn, and does not age. Matters number infinitely, but the principle (理 *lǐ*) ultimately is one *dào*. There is no one who realizes it; no one who attains it.[67]

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[64] Park, 211. Note: the literal meaning of 神明 *shén míng* being "bright *shén*," this term is most often used colloquially to mean "god(s)" in the broadest sense.

[65] 根門 (*gēn mén*, *indriya*, entry way of faculties): "Basic Meaning: gates of the faculties. Senses: The openings of the six faculties 六根 to the senses, through which flows desire and attachment." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “根門” [Gates of the faculties], by Charles Muller, last modified October 17, 2013, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?68.xml+id(%27b6839-9580%27).

[66] 三界 (*sān jiè*, *trailokya* or *traidhātuka*, threefold universe): "Basic Meaning: three realms [desire, form, and formless]. Senses: The three realms of *saṃsāra*; also 三有." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “三界” [Three realms], by Charles Patton and Charles Muller, last modified January 25, 2021, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e09-754c%27).

[67] My translation. Hereinafter, English translation from Chinese is assumed to be mine unless otherwise indicated.

In summary, with the exception of Xuán Zàng, most other Chinese translators of Indian Buddhist scriptures, as well as authors of commentaries, preferred to interpret the highest human consciousness, the *ālaya-vijñāna*, as an independent and permanent entity, in concordance with the prevailing Daoist philosophy and religion. This interpretation or interpolation has left an indelible and far-reaching impression in subsequent development of Buddhism in China and East Asia.

## "Self" in Chán Buddhism

A very peculiar phenomena occurred after the first five centuries or so of Buddhism development in China. The indigenous school of Chán (禪, abbreviated from 禪那 *chán nà*, which is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word *dhyāna*, meaning "meditation") began to flourish at about the time of the traditionally recognized sixth patriarch of Chán, 慧能 (Huì Néng 638-713). Although the meditational practice of *dhyāna* has the same long history as the introduction of translated Buddhist scriptures, the school of Chán had evolved a long way from the original Buddhism, especially in the mode of enlightenment as regarding the true self.[68]

For an early elucidation of the *self* in Chán Buddhism, the analytical writings of the Chán master, Guī Fōng Zōng Mì 圭峰宗密 (780-841) is indispensible. Zōngmì is traditionally recognized as the fifth patriarch of the Huáyán (華嚴, lit. "flower garland") school in China. And because of his great literary contribution to Chán Buddhism in composing a canon for it, he has garnered for himself the rare distinction of also being recognized as a patriarch for a second school – the Hézé (菏澤) sect of Chán. That important work, entitled *Collected Writings on the*

[68] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 218.

*Source of Chán* (禪源諸詮集 *Chán Yuán Zhū Quán Jí*), is unfortunately lost in transmission, making the preface to it, *Prolegomena to the Collected Writings on the Source of Chán* (禪源諸詮集都序 *Chán Yuán Zhū Quán Jí Dū Xù*), his extant magnum opus.[69] Broughton, the English translator of this work, considers the work of this "renowned Chan master as well as one of China's greatest scholars of the Buddhist scriptures, with many years of rigorous Chan practice at his mountain hermitage, … to undermine the foundational assumptions of [Japanese Zen Schools'] commonly accepted model of the separateness of Zen mind and canonical word."[70] The *Prolegomena* categorizes the broad Chán schools into three sects, based on their views of attaining *nirvāṇa*.

> 禪三宗者。一息妄修心宗。二泯絕無寄宗。三直顯心性宗。教三種者。一密意依性說相教。二密意破相顯性教。三顯示真心即性教。
> (T48n2015_p0402b17-20).
>
> (Translation part 1:) There are three sects of Chán. The first is the sect of "Extinguishing Delusions to Cultivate the Mind." The second is the sect of "Eliminating All Things and Clinging to Nothing." The third is the sect of "Direct Manifestation of the Nature of the Mind."[71]
>
> (Translation part 2:) Respectively, the three sects teach: firstly, "the teaching of cryptic meaning that relies on (dharma) nature to speak of characteristics"; secondly, "the teaching of cryptic meaning that eradicates characteristics to reveal (dharma) nature"; and thirdly, "The teaching that openly shows that the true mind is (dharma) nature."[72]

In Zōngmì's mind, these three sects are, in the order presented, progressively higher levels of teaching. But all three teach the existence of buddha nature without exception. At the first and lowest level, "although all sentient beings originally possess the buddha nature, yet it is

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[69] Bryan Van Norden and Nicholaos Jones, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, November 5, 2019, s.v. "Huayan Buddhism," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/buddhism-huayan/.

[70] Jeffrey Lyle Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, Translations from the Asian Classics (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2009), 2. Broughton (1944–) is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Long Beach. https://web.archive.org/web/20220406170940/https://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/JeffreyBroughton.html

[71] My translation of the first part.

[72] Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, 28.

so covered by the beginningless ignorance (*avidyā* 無明 *wú míng*) as to be invisible, resulting in *saṃsāra*, the cycles of death and rebirth" (初息妄修心宗者。說眾生雖本有佛性。而無始無明覆之不見故輪迴生死。T48n2015_p0402b21-23). J. Park explains the rationale for its lowest ranking: "The reason why this tenet is regarded as the lowest is that those who hold it regard deluded thinking or its objects as real entities and attempt to eliminate them."[73] Such Chán teachers/founders as Zhì Shēn 智侁 (609-702), Shén Xiòu 神秀 (606-706), Bǎo Táng 保唐 (714-74), Xuān Shí 宣什 and their disciples belonged to this tenet (南侁北秀保唐宣什等門下。皆此類也。T48n2015_p0402b29-c01).

The name assigned to the second sect, "Eliminating All Things and Clinging to Nothing," implies that they emphasized the doctrine of *śūnyatā*, so much so that all dharmas, even buddhas, are denied their reality. In the realm of emptiness, not even buddhas exist. "All dharmas, whether secular or sacred, are empty as dreams. It has been empty and silent from the beginning, not just presently. Even this wisdom of attaining nothingness cannot be achieved. The realm of the equality of dharmas has no buddhas, and no sentient beings. The realm of dharmas is also designatory label (*prajñapti* 假名 *jiǎ míng*, 二泯絕無寄宗者。說凡聖等法。皆如夢幻都無所有。本來空寂非今始無。即此達無之智亦不可得。平等法界無佛。無眾生。法界亦是假名。T48n2015_p0402c03-06).[74] ( Those considered by Zōngmì to fit in this category were Nióu Tóu 牛頭 (594-657), Shí Tóu 石頭 (700-790), Jìng Shān 徑山 (714-92), and the schools of Hé Zé 荷澤, Jāng Xī 江西, Tiān Tái 天台, etc. (石頭牛頭下至徑山。皆示此理。

[73] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 219.

[74] 假名 (*jiǎ míng*, *prajñapti*, designatory label): "Senses: Nominally established (Skt. *prajñapti*; Pāli *paññatti*). To nominally designate; a metaphor—is an important notion in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Since all things are empty 空,—that is, devoid of a definitive, inherent nature, the names that applied to things also lack an inherent nature." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “假名” [Designatory label], by Charles Muller, last modified January 29, 2015, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?50.xml+id(%27b5047-540d%27).

T48n2015_p0402c10 … 荷澤江西天台等門下亦說此理。T48n2015_p0402c14-15). From the lack of the mention of "buddha nature," we may infer that the second sect did not deviate too much from the Yogācāra teachings. "Zōngmì placed this tenet above the first one because it teaches that from the beginning there is no delusion or external object."[75]

The third sect, deemed highest by Zōngmì, is where the *self* really shines forth in Chán Buddhism. Broughton finds that this teaching, which "openly shows that the true mind is dharma nature," receives confirmation from "such sutras as the *Huayan*, *Secret Array*, *Perfect Awakening*, *Buddha Top-knot* (=*Heroic Progess* [sic. Progress] *Samadhi*), *Śrīmālā*, *Buddha-in-Embryo* [*Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*], *Lotus*, and *Nirvana* and in such treatises as the *Ratnagotra*, *Buddha Nature*, *Awakening of Faith*, *Ten Stages*, *Dharma Sphere*, and *Nirvana*."[76] In the *Prolegomena* is found the following description:

> 三直顯心性宗者。說一切諸法若有若空皆唯真性。真性無相無為。體非一切。謂非凡非聖非因非果非善非惡等。然即體之用而能造作種種。(T48n2015_p0402c15-19).
>
> (Translation) This sect teaches that all dharmas appear both to exist and to be empty, but they are only the true nature (真性 *zhēn xìng*), which has no characteristics and no acts. Its essence is not everything. It is neither profane, nor sacred; neither causes, nor effects; neither good, nor evil. And yet, the function of the essence can create all kinds of phenomena.

Similarly, J. Park's comment about this true nature representing the self of all beings is that its status is elevated to that of 神 *shén*.

> … everything is a complete manifestation of the true nature. This true nature, called *foxing* (佛性 Buddha-nature), *rulaizang* (如來藏 *tathāgatagarbha*), *zhongshengxin* (眾生心 the mind of living beings), *zhenwo* (真我 true self), etc., has the characteristics of permanent existence (*sat*), being conscious (*cit*), being happy (*ānanda*) and creating everything. … this can be perfectly understood in

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[75] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 219.

[76] Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, 30.

terms of the Chinese Buddhist concept of *shen*, which is the essence of the mind, the purest embodiment of *dao* and the permanent agent in *samsara*.[77]

To summarize this third sect, Zōngmì wrote the following terse verses:

直指自心即是真性。不約事相而示。亦不約心相而示。故云即性。不是方便隱密之意。故云顯示也。此教說一切眾生皆有空寂真心。無始本來性自清淨。(不因斷惑成淨。故云性淨。… 明明不昧了了常知 (下引佛說) 盡未來際常住不滅。名為佛性。亦名如來藏。亦名心地(達摩所傳是此心也)從無始際妄想翳之。不自證得耽著生死。大覺憫之出現於世。為說生死等法一切皆空。開示此心全同諸佛。(T48n2015_p0404b26-c05).

(Translation) It directly points out that one's own mind (自心 *zì xīn*, Skt. *svacitta*) is the true nature (真性 *zhēn xìng*, Skt. *tattva*). It does not engage the characteristics of matters, nor of the mind, to manifest; therefore it talks of immediate nature. It is not expedient, nor cryptic, meaning; thus it speaks of manifestation. This sect teaches that all sentient beings have the true mind (真心 *zhēn xīn*) of emptiness and tranquility, which from beginningless time has always possessed a self-nature of purity. It is not purified by eliminating ignorance; thus it is called the nature of purity. … It shines bright without darkness; it perceives clearly and knows constantly. (The Buddha said:) It exhausts all future lifetimes, and constantly abides in the inextinguishable. Its name is buddha nature, also called *Tathāgatagarbha*, or the mind's ground (what the Bodhidharma preached was this mind/heart). From beginningless time, it has been obscured by delusive conceptualization (妄想 , Skt. *abhūta-vikalpa*). Without attaining self-realization, it would remain in (the cycles of) life and death. The Great Awakened One, having compassions for it, appeared in the world, in order to preach that all dharmas of life and death are empty, and to demonstrate that this mind is identical to all buddhas.[78]

This synopsis by Zōngmì on the third sect, the "Direct Manifestation of the Nature of the Mind (直顯心性宗 *Zhí Xiěn Xīn Xìng Zōng*)" tenet, describes his understanding of this so-called highest and most profound (and perhaps most representative) teaching of the Chinese Chán school, that all sentient beings have within themselves a true "self," called the true nature or true mind that is permanent, imperishable, beginningless, and eternal, and that it is originally pure and uncontaminated. For reasons unknown, however, it is covered by delusions from time

[77] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 220.

[78] Translation mine, with Sanskrit terms from Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, 30.

immemorial, causing it to be firmly chained to *saṃsāra*. But liberation from the bondage and restoration of self to its pristine, unbound condition would be possible if one only follows the way of the Buddha.

In early Indian Buddhism, the doctrine of *anātman* was promulgated to confront the *ātmán* thought of Brahmanic schools such as Advaita Vedanta, who were major competitors of Buddhism, and who tended to reify the *ātmán* as a permanent self, ultimately equivalent to the Creator, Brahman, himself. In opposition to this eternalism, Nāgārjuna advocated the Mādhyamika (Middle Way) tenet, based on the *śūnyatā* proposition of the Buddha, and claimed it to be situated in between the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism. And then the Yogācāra school took it a notch further to posit a consciousness called *Ālaya-Vijñāna*, as a non-substantial entity of storehouse for karmic seeds, which are solely responsible for the creation of the phenomenal world.

It is clear that later developments of Chinese Buddhism, especially the Chán school, has departed a long way from the original Indian Buddhism transmitted to China about half a millennium prior. Chinese innovation of the concept of the self, whether substantial or not, has ubiquitously crept into Mahāyāna thinking and established itself as a well-founded, well-received, and indispensible notion in East Asian Buddhism.

## *Buddha Nature in the Buddha Nature Treatise*

In Western Buddhist studies, Buddha nature does not seem to occupy as significant a place as it does in East Asian Buddhism. Soon after Buddhism was first introduced in China, the practically-minded ancient Chinese became curious as to the attainability of buddhahood by all sentient beings other than the Buddhas themselves – are all beings capable of such a high reach?

Or, is the lofty goal limited to just the few historical Buddhas, or perhaps to a few of the most fortunate and most advanced among those bound in the realm of *saṃsāra*? If everyone is eligible for this elusive goal, then how long and in what ways may one reach it? Eventually, the early Chinese Buddhists opted to relegate the translations of Xuán Zàng, which followed closely the Yogācāra tenets, and instead to adapt Buddhism to the Chinese thought world, perhaps in part motivated by the desire to make the foreign religion less eccentric and more acceptable for the populace. The expansion of the buddha nature or *tathāgatagarbha* theory played an important role in this process of indigenization. So much so, that the concept of buddha nature became not only "normative for Chinese Buddhism as a whole," but "pivotal for all of East Asian Buddhism." In this way, the teaching of buddha nature helped to set the foundations of such indigenous Chinese schools as 天台 (Tiān Tái, lit. "heavenly platform"), 華嚴 (Huá Yén, lit. "flower garland"), and 禪 (Chán).[79]

Buddha nature is defined by Muller and Tanaka as "the innate buddha-mind, indicating the potential to actualize buddhahood, possessed by sentient beings. Buddha-nature is understood as being not fully actualized prior to the full attainment of buddhahood; thus sentient beings are required to purify themselves through practice to achieve its realization."[80] This definition certainly comports more with the "embryo" than the "womb" aspect of the *garbha* bivalent ambiguity. Interestingly, the buddha nature conception seemed to have arisen along with *tathāgatagarbha* theorization, right in the native habitat of Buddhism. "In Indian Buddhism, the notion that all sentient beings can become Buddha is articulated in such seminal scriptures as the *Lotus Sutra* and *Nirvana Sutra*, becoming explained in greater theoretical detail in treatises such

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[79] King, *Buddha Nature*, 2–3.

[80] A. Charles Muller and Kenneth Ken'ichi Tanaka, trans., *The Brahmā's Net Sutra (Taishō Volume 24, Number 1484)*, dBET pdf, BDK English Tripiṭaka Series (Moraga, CA: BDK America, 2017), 81.

as the *Ratnagotravibhāga* 寶性論 [*Bǎo Xìng Luèn*] and the *Buddha-nature Treatise* 佛性論 [*Fuó Xìng Luèn*]." As alluded previously, Chinese Buddhism further promoted the buddha nature idea because it "[resonated] with the indigenous East Asian essence-function 體用 [*tǐ yòng*] paradigm," and inescapably "became a central tenet in the majority of surviving influential schools."[81]

The *Buddha Nature Treatise* (BNT) is attributed to Vasubandhu, and translated into Chinese by Paramārtha. It further separates the buddha nature into three natures (*bhāva*), or rather, two sets of three natures because it first describes them in terms of their "negativity/nothingness 無 (wú)," before discussing their positive aspects:

> 三無性者，一無相性、二無生性、三無真性。此三性攝如來性盡。何以故？以此三性通為體故。(T31n1610_p0794a26-8).
>
> (Translation) The three non-natures are: the non-characteristic nature, the non-birth nature; and the non-reality nature. These three natures completely capture the *Tathāgata* nature. Why so? Because they altogether comprise its essence.

The author first delineated the three non-natures to conform with the orthodox teaching of the Buddha, that *Tathāgata*'s nature is essentially *śūnya*, empty or void. This would also serve as a refutation from potential attacks that it is "a crypto-Hindu entitative mind or soul." Having laid the preparatory foundation, the treatise proceeds to describe the other three positive natures proper as: the discriminating nature, *parikalpita svabhāva* (*fēn-bié-xìng* [分別性]); the relative nature, *paratantra svabhāva* (*yī-tā-xìng* [依他性]); and the true nature, *parinispanna svabhāva* (*zhēn-shí-xìng* [真實性]).[82] The *trisvabhāva* is briefly described from the following excerpt in *Taishō Tripiṭaka* T31n1610_p0794b08-14, with King's English translation:

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[81] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "佛性" [Buddha-nature], by Charles Muller, last modified December 22, 2018, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4f.xml+id(%27b4f5b-6027%27).

[82] King, *Buddha Nature*, 42–43. Chinese characters added.

> 為隨名言假說故，立分別性。若無此名言則分別性不成，故知此性但是名言所顯實無體相，是名分別性。
>
> (Translation) The discriminating nature is established on the basis of the use of the language of provisional speech. If there were no such terms, then the discriminating nature would not come into being. Therefore you should know that this nature is merely a matter of verbal expression, in reality it has no essence and no properties. This is what is called the discriminating nature.
>
> 依他性者，是十二因緣所顯道理，為分別性作依止故，故立依他性。
>
> (Translation) The relative nature is the principle (*dào lǐ*) that manifests as the twelvefold chain of conditioned origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*). Because it serves as a basis (*yī zhǐ*) for the discriminating nature, it is established as the relative (*yī tā*) nature.
>
> 真實性者，一切諸法真如、聖人無分別智境，為清淨二性、為解脫三，或為引出一切諸德故，立真實性。
>
> (Translation) The true nature is the Thusness (*zhēn rú*) of all things. It is the non-discriminating wisdom realm of the wise. For the sake of purifying the [first] two natures, realizing the third [i.e., liberation], and cultivating all virtues, the true nature is established.[83]

From the above we get the sense of some "ranking" of the three natures, in that the first (discriminating) nature is based on the second (relative) nature, and the third (true) nature purifies them both. Further on, the importance of the third (true) nature becomes apparent:

> 問曰：若真實性無，有何過失？答曰：若無真實性，則一切一切種清淨境不得成故。(T31n1610_p0795b21-3).
>
> (Translation) Question: "if there were no true nature, what would be the fault?" Reply: "If there were no true nature, then every and all types of pure realms could not be accomplished.

This answer shows the indispensible, absolute characteristic of the true nature. King reads it as having two senses: "two possible interpretations for this sentence: (1) If there were no (subjective) true nature, one would never experience certain states of purity; or (2) if there were no (objective) true nature, the 'pure' quality of the world would not exist. In fact, both meanings

[83] King, 43.

are intended simultaneously." In addition, she ascribes the same bilateral subjective-objective cases for all three natures.[84] As for the ontological status of the three natures, the treatise further expounds the following:

> 二別體者，於三性中各有實義。何者實義？
>
> (Translation) As to the second, distinct essence, it has the sense of reality in each of the three natures. What are the sense of reality?
>
> 一者分別性體恒無所有，而此義於分別性中非不為實。何以故？名言無倒故。
>
> (Translation) Firstly, the essence of the discriminating nature is eternally lacking existence, and yet this sense in the discriminating nature is not (completely) unreal. Why so? It is because the name(s) and the word(s) [of this nature] do not fail.
>
> 二者依他性體有而不實，由亂識根境故是有，以非真如故不實。何以故？因緣義無倒故。是以對分別性故名為有，對後真性故非實有，是名有不真實。
>
> (Translation) Secondly, the essence of the relative nature exists but is not real. Due to the root realm of delusional consciousness, it is considered existent; yet due to its not being true *tathāta*, it is not real. Why so? It is because the doctrine of *hetu-pratyaya* [因緣] does not fail. Therefore, relative to the discriminating nature it is called existent, but relative to the true nature it does not really exist; thus it is called existent but not actually real.
>
> 三者真實性體，有無皆真，如如之體非有非無故。(T31n1610_p0794c08-15)
>
> (Translation) Thirdly, the essence of the true nature is real regarding its existence or nonexistence, because the essence of *tathāta* is neither existent nor nonexistent.

The simultaneous negation of existence and nonexistence for the second and third natures speaks of the fact that they cannot be discerned in those terms, indicating that they are in a different category than our common perception. But, then, how are these three natures connected in our experiential life? For this question, the author provided the following relational statement:

> 依他有二種，一染濁依他、二清淨依他。染濁依他，緣分別得成；清淨依他，緣如如得成故。(T31n1610_p0794c03-5).

[84] King, 44–45.

> (Translation) The relative nature consists of two categories: one is polluted, and the other is pure. The polluted relative nature becomes established due to discrimination; the pure relative nature becomes established due to *tathāta*.

This simple yet profound conclusion of the Treatise summarily condenses all three natures into a single one, viz. the relative nature, which can be viewed in the pure condition as the true nature, or the polluted state as the discriminating nature. "Insofar as one experiences [the relative nature] in the mode of discrimination, the discriminating nature is operative; insofar as one experiences Thusness, the true nature is operative. In other words, the relative nature, which is the only possible given, is purified by Thusness and sullied by discrimination." But ultimately, the fully awakened state is equivalent to the pure relative nature, since "true nature gives us our clearest image of the Buddha nature as manifest in a non-distorted fashion. The true nature, like Buddha nature, is fully real yet uncharacterizable by either existence or nonexistence. ⋯ its nature is equated with Thusness: the realty of things as they are and knowledge of that reality."[85]

By classifying the buddha nature into separate categories, the BNT gives us an inner view of the "true self" – a dynamic nature that can be altered by one's inclinations and actions. But, to realize its full potential, the "true nature" must thoroughly take over the entire being to effect full awakening and liberation.

## *The Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine and Major Sūtras*

Buddhism's *tathāgatagarbha* thoughts center around the concept that there exists a *tathāgatagarbha* within all sentient beings without exception, giving each of them the potential to become a buddha. Muller defines the term in three aspects: "(a) the meaning that the absolute body of the *Tathāgata* (*dharmakāya*) is existent within all living creatures; (b) the meaning that

[85] King, 47–48.

the *tathāgata* as reality-nature (thusness) is a whole without distinctions; (c) the meaning that the *tathāgata* exists within every living creature in a seed, or embryonic form."[86] The first and last definitions differ from the second one in that they give the *tathāgatagarbha* an individual existence, as opposed to the all-encompassing "corporate" or "universal" existence of the *tathāgatagarbha*, which transcends individuality, in the second meaning. The "embryonic" and the "*dharmakāya*" views obviously differ due to their interpretation of the "*garbha*" part of the compound word, taking it as either an "embryo" or a "womb," respectively.

The origin of the t*athāgatagarbha* doctrine can be traced to India, although it did not belong specifically to any distinct school. Most of early *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures were written anonymously, or the authors just were not transmitted along with the texts. The consensus is that they were produced around 200 to 350 CE. King lists four *sūtras* as the most important early *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures, as delineated below. What is remarkable is the fact that these texts predated the Yogācāra masters Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, meaning that this type of thought most likely did not originate in the Yogācāra school. The most significant early *tathāgatagarbha* texts are listed below with sample excerpts for reference:[87]

6. The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* – The Buddha utilized nine examples to illustrate the fact that the *tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings is covered by adventitious defilements. "These images … convey the basic idea of the universal immanence of Buddhahood that nonetheless is experientially unavailable to ordinary persons."[88]

> 我以佛眼觀一切眾生，貪欲恚癡諸煩惱中，有如來智、如來眼、如來身，結加趺坐儼然不動。善男子！一切眾生雖在諸趣，煩惱身中有如來藏，常無染

[86] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "如來藏" [Womb of the tathāgata], by Charles Muller, last modified December 22, 2018, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?59.xml+id(%27b5982-4f86-85cf%27).

[87] King, *Buddha Nature*, 11–12.

[88] King, 12.

污、德相備足，如我無異。又善男子！譬如天眼之人觀未敷花，見諸花內有如來身結加趺坐，除去萎花便得顯現。(T16n0666_p0457b28-c05).

(Translation) When I regard all beings with my buddha *cakshur* (eye), I see that hidden within the *kleshas* (barbs) of *raga* (greed), *lobha* (confusion), *dvesha* (hatred) and *moha* (obscuration) there is seated augustly and unmovingly the *Tathagata jnana*, the *Tathagata*-vision and the *Tathagata kaya*. Kulaputras, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of *kleshas*, have a *tathagata-garbha* that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with virtues no different from my own. Moreover, kulaputras, it is just like a person with supernatural vision who can see the bodies of *tathagatas* seated in the lotus position inside the flowers, even though the petals are not yet unfurled; whereas after the wilted petals have been removed, those *tathagatas* are manifested for all to see.[89]

諸佛法爾，若佛出世若不出世，一切眾生如來之藏常住不變，但彼眾生煩惱覆故。(T16n0666_p0457c07-09).

(Translation) Such is the dharma of all Buddhas. Whether or not buddhas appear in the world, the *tathagata-garbha* of all beings are eternal and unchanging. It is just that they are covered by *kleshas* of sentient beings.[90]

7. *Śrīmālādevī-Siṃhanāda Sūtra* – "*Sutra of Queen Śrīmālā of the Lion's Roar*," is not in existence in the original Sanskrit, but only found in the Chinese and Tibetan translations. The philosophical themes are mainly two theories: the *tathāgatagarbha* and the *ekayāna* ("one vehicle").[91] Queen Śrīmālā had already accumulated enough merits in previous lives to become a bodhisattva and was on her way to buddhahood. The Buddha appeared to her in splendor, and she declared these doctrinal understandings in his presence.[92] Some excerpts related to *tathāgatagarbha* are:

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[89] Grosnick, William H. (1995), trans., "Tathagata-Garbha Sutra," March 27, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130327002052/http://huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/resources/downloads/sutras/02Prajnaparamita/Tathagatagarbha.doc.pdf.

[90] Grosnick, William H. (1995).

[91] "[It] teaches that the three Ways (triyāna)—the Śrāvakayāna, the Pratyekabuddhayāna, and the Bodhisattvayāna—taught by the Buddha all converge in the single Buddhayāna. This view also teaches that the first two Ways were merely taught as skilful means (upāya-kauśalya) and that the Bodhisattvayāna is actually identical to the single Buddhayāna." Oxford Reference, s.v. "Ekayāna," accessed April 18, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095745106.

[92] Diana Y. Paul, trans., *The Sutra of Queen Śrīmālā of the Lion's Roar* (Moraga, CA: BDK America, 2004), 5. Paul received her PhD in Buddhist Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was a Stanford University professor in Buddhist Studies.

「世尊！有二種如來藏空智。世尊！空如來藏，若離、若脫、若異一切煩惱藏。世尊！不空如來藏， 過於恒沙不離、不脫、不異、不思議佛法。世尊！此二空智，諸大聲聞能信如來。一切阿羅漢、 辟支佛空智，於四不顛倒境界轉。是故一切阿羅漢、辟支佛，本所不見、本所不得。一切苦滅， 唯佛得證，壞一切煩惱藏，修一切滅苦道。(T12n0353_p0221c16-23).

(Translation) O Lord, there are two kinds of wisdom of emptiness with reference to the *tathāgatagarbha*. The *tathāgatagarbha* that is empty is separate from, free from, and different from the stores of all defilements. And the *tathāgatagarbha* that is not empty is not separate from, not free from, and not different from the inconceivable Buddha-Dharmas more numerous than the sands of the Ganges River. O Lord, the various great disciples can believe in the *Tathāgata* with reference to the two wisdoms of emptiness. All *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* revolve in the realm of the four contrary views because of their knowledge of emptiness. Thus, *arhats* and *pratyekabuddhas* do not originally see nor attain [the wisdom of the *tathāgatagarbha*]. The extinction of all suffering is only realized by the buddhas who destroy the stores of all defilements and practice the path that extinguishes all suffering.[93]

非如來藏有生有死。如來藏者離有為相，如來藏常住不變。是故如來藏，是依、是持、是建立。 世尊！不離、不斷、不脫、不異、不思議佛法。世尊！斷脫異外有為法依持、建立者，是如來藏。 (T12n0353_p0222b10-14).

(Translation) The *tathāgatagarbha* is neither life nor death. The *tathāgatagarbha* is separate from the conditioned. The *tathāgatagarbha* is eternal and unchanging. Therefore, the *tathāgatagarbha* is the basis, the support, and the foundation. O Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha* is not separate, not severed, not liberated from, and not different from the inconceivable Buddha-Dharmas. O Lord, the basis, support, and foundation of conditioned phenomena, which are severed from, separate from, and different from the Buddha-Dharmas, [also] are the *tathāgatagarbha*.[94]

「世尊！如來藏者，是法界藏、法身藏、出世間上上藏、自性清淨藏。此性清淨如來藏，而客塵煩惱、 上煩惱所染，不思議如來境界。 (T12n0353_p0222b22-24).

(Translation) O Lord, the *tathāgatagarbha* is the womb of the dharmas, the womb of the Dharma body, the transcendental womb, and the inherently pure womb. This *tathāgatagarbha* that is inherently pure is the inconceivable realm of the *Tathāgata* that has been contaminated by extrinsic defilements and other virulent defilements.[95]

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[93] Paul, 37.

[94] Paul, 45.

[95] Paul, 46.

8. *Anūnatvāpūrṇatva Nirdeśa* – "The Instructions on Non-Decreasing and Non-Increasing"; 不增不減經 *Bù Zēng Bù Jiǎn Jīng*), like the *Śrīmālādevī Sūtra*, is non-extant in the original Sanskrit. It is only passed down to us in the 520 CE Chinese translation by Bodhiruci (d. 527, transliterated as 菩提流支). According to Jones, this *sūtra*, similar to the *Śrīmālādevī Sūtra*, "does not present the *tathāgatagarbha* as something that resides 'within' sentient beings, or as a component element of their being. Hence the AAN constitutes a further development of *tathāgatagarbha* teaching after this expression had been extricated from its ātmavādin roots."[96] This short *sūtra* touches upon the subject of *tathāgatagarbha* by equating it with the two *dhātus*, the *Dharmadhātu* (or *Dharmakāya* 法身 *Fǎ Shēn*) and the *sattvadhātu* ("realm/essence of sentient beings", 眾生界 *zòng shēng jiè*).[97] About the somewhat ambiguous Sanskrit part, *dhātu*, translated in Chinese as 界 *jiè*, Silk observes keenly that its "polyvalency … or at least its bivalency as both 'realm' and 'quintessence' is essential to the message of the authors of some scriptures, including the AAN," which presents a challenge to the translators. But Bodhiruci opted to use this Chinese translation "to maintain the identity of the term throughout … such that *sattvadhātu* in the sense of 'realm of beings' is indistinguishable in Chinese from *sattvadhātu* in the sense of 'quintessence of beings.'"[98] In my opinion, this would be true if Bodhiruci has alternately and indiscriminately used both 界

[96] Christopher V. Jones, *The Buddhist Self: On Tathāgatagarbha and Ātman* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2021), 140. Jones is an affiliated lecturer of the Divinity Faculty and Bye-Fellow of Selwyn College, University of Cambridge.

[97] Stephen Hodge, trans., "Instruction On Non-Decrease, Non-Increase Sutra: Anunatva Apurnatva Nirdesa Sutra," emptyuniverse, April 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20070927152528/http://www.empty-universe.com/tathagatagarbha/anunatvaapurnatvanirdesa.htm. Hodge (1947–) was ordained as a Shingon monk and is primarily involved in early Mahāyāna and translations of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist texts. He is also a research fellow at the University of Hamburg and teaches Buddhism at the Buddhist Society and Birbeck College, London University.

[98] Jonathan A. Silk, *Buddhist Cosmic Unity: An Edition, Translation and Study of the Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśaparivarta*, Hamburg Buddhist Studies 4 (Hamburg: Hamburg Univ. Press, 2015), 28. Silk (1960–) is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies in Netherlands.

*jiè* and 性 *xìng*, because the former mostly indicates just "realm" without the meaning of "essence."[99] But, to give Silk the benefit of the doubt, the "quintessence" variation was perhaps an ancient Chinese usage, and does seem to make more sense in making the *tathāgatagarbha* the innate nature of all sentient beings. Again, some relevant portions are listed below:

> 舍利弗！甚深義者即是第一義諦，第一義諦者即是眾生界，眾生界者即是如來藏，如來藏者即是法身。舍利弗！如我所說法身義者，過於恒沙， 不離不脫、不斷不異、不思議佛法、如來功德智慧。(T16n0668_p0467a16-21).
>
> (Translation) Oh, Śāriputra, the very profound significance is exactly the ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). The ultimate truth is exactly the realm of sentient beings (*sattvadhātu*). The realm of sentient beings is exactly the *tathāgatagarbha*. The *Tathāgatagarbha* is exactly the *Dharmakāya*. Oh Śāriputra, this *Dharmakāya* taught by me, its meaning is greater than the sands of the Ganges; it is not separate from, not cut away from or different from the inconceivable buddha dharma, [which is] Tathāgata's merits and wisdom.
>
> 「舍利弗！此法身者，是不生不滅法，非過去際、非未來際，離二邊故。舍利弗！非過去際者離生時故，非未來際者離滅時故。舍利弗！如來法身常，以不異法故、以不盡法故。舍利弗！如來法身恒，以常可歸依故、以未來際平等故。舍利弗！如來法身清涼，以不二法故、以無分別法故。舍利弗，如來法身不變，以非滅法故、以非作法故。(T16n0668_p0467a27-b05).
>
> (Translation) This dharma-body, Śāriputra, is one which has the quality of being unborn and unperishing. It is unlimited in the past and unlimited in the future, because it is free from the two extremes. It is unlimited in the past, Śāriputra, because it is free from a time of birth, and it is unlimited in the future because it is free from a time of perishing. The Tathāgata's dharma-body, Śāriputra, is permanent because of its quality of immutability, because of its quality of inexhaustibility. The Tathāgata's dharma-body, Śāriputra, is constant because it can permanently be taken as a refuge, because it is equal with the future limit (of *saṁsāra*). The Tathāgata's dharma-body, Śāriputra, is tranquil because of its non-dual nature, because of its nature as free from discrimination. The Tathāgata's

[99] "界 [jiè] 名 [noun]: 1. (界限) boundary … 2. (階層) circles *plural* … 3. (範圍) range … 4. (類別) category." *Collins Chinese-English Dictionary*, s.v. "界," accessed April 19, 2022, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/zh/dictionary/chinese_traditional-english/%E7%95%8C.

> dharma-body, Śāriputra, is unchangable [sic.] because of its imperishable nature, because of its non-created nature.[100]
>
> 「復次舍利弗！如我上說，眾生界中亦三種法，皆真實如，不異不差。何謂三法？一者如來藏本際相應體及清淨法， 二者如來藏本際不相應體及煩惱纏不清淨法，三者如來藏未來際平等恒及有法。(T16n0668_p0467b24).
>
> (Translation) Once again, Śāriputra, as I expounded earlier, within the realm of beings too there are three types of natures. All are true thusness, not distinct and not [mutually] separate. What are the three natures? 1. The nature that is the embryo of the tathāgatas [*tathāgatagarbhas*] which from the very beginning is in its intrinsic nature associated [with it] and is pure. 2. The nature that is the embryo of the tathāgatas [*tathāgatagarbhas*] which from the very beginning is in its intrinsic nature unassociated [with it] and, being covered with defilements, is unpurified. 3. The nature that is the embryo of the tathāgatas [*tathāgatagarbhas*] which is equal to the future limit (of saṁsāra), constant, and existing.[101]

9. *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* – In comparison to the above three *sūtras*, King opines that the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* presents little innovations of its own, in the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*, with the exception that, apparently for the first time in Buddhist scriptures, it equates the term *tathāgatagarbha* to *tathāgatadhātu* (如來性 *rú lái xìng*) and *buddhadhātu* (佛性 *fuó xìng*). However, the relevant discourse "tends to be rather unsystematic and seems to speak with many voices," an unfortunate vagueness which presented opportunities for the creative minds of the ancient Chinese Buddhists, as they turned such linguistic imprecision into "a fruitful one for later students and commentators, who were obliged to create their own order and bring it to the text." The substantial messages of the *sūtra* accentuate the permanence of buddhahood, and indirectly refutes the concept of *nirvāna* being the equivalent of extinction.[102]

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[100] Silk, *Buddhist Cosmic Unity: An Edition, Translation and Study of the Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśaparivarta*, 100–101.

[101] Silk, 113.

[102] King, *Buddha Nature*, 14.

Among these four most important early Buddhist *sūtras* that propound the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* is perhaps the most influential in East Asian Buddhism, having "impacted East Asian Buddhism so fundamentally," with its "presentation of buddha nature [having become] the main scriptural basis for the discussion of *tathāgatagarbha* in China."[103, 104] Radich considers that "the history of interpretation of this text in China and East Asia generally is a vital and crucial chapter in the history of East Asian Buddhism."[105] Because of this *sūtra's* critical importance in regards to the *tathāgatagarbha* theory, we will discuss it in more details in the next section.

## *The Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra*

The (*Mahāyāna*) *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (MPNS, 大般涅槃經 *Dà Bān Niè Pán Jīng*), commonly called *Nirvāna Sūtra*, has been shown by H. Habata to be a common misnomer, which should be more accurately titled *Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra* (MPNMS, the "*Great Sūtra of the Great, Perfect Nirvāna"*).[106] Here we employ both acronyms interchangeably according to the sources used, to conform to their own conventions. The *Sūtra*'s key role in China and East Asia had been established quite early in Chinese Buddhist history, when it stirred up enthusiastic discussions within the Chinese Buddhist community even prior to the completion of its

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[103] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:xii.

[104] Karl Brunnhölzl, *When the Clouds Part: The Uttaratantra and Its Meditative Tradition as a Bridge between Sutra and Tantra* (Boston: Snow Lion, 2014), 17. Brunnhölzl, MD, is a senior teacher and translator in the Nalandabodhi community and at Nitartha Institute.

[105] Michael Radich, "Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Jonathan A. Silk, Oskar von Hinuber, and Vincent Eltschinger, vol. 1, *Literature and Languages* (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 2015), 264, https://www.academia.edu/15968049/_Tath%C4%81gatagarbha_Scriptures_In_Brills_Encyclopedia_of_Buddhism_Volume_One_Literature_and_Languages_edited_by_Jonathan_Silk_Oskar_von_Hin%C3%BCber_and_Vincent_Eltschinger_261_273_Leiden_Brill_2015. Radich is Professor of Buddhist Studies at Universität Heidelberg.

[106] Radich, 264.

translation at the beginning of the fifth century.[107] The first Chinese translation was done by 法顯 (Fǎ Xiǎn, 337-422), who preceded the pilgrimage of Xuán Zàng by some two centuries to travel to India for the authentic Buddhist scriptures (399-414), on a commission appointed by the imperial court.[108] Fǎ Xiǎn translated the first, shorter, version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* from the Pāli canon, called *Mahāparinibbāna-Suttanta*, which evinces Gautama Buddha's life and sermons in his last days on earth. Though the Pāli *Suttanta* exerts great influence in Theravāda countries, it is much less prominent in East Asian Buddhism, having been overshadowed by the longer version of Dharmakṣema (曇無讖 Tánmó-chèn or 竺法豐 Zhú Fǎ Fōng, 385–433), which is an astonishing fact considering that the two editions were published within the span of a decade. Apparently, Fǎ Xiǎn's work had been under serious criticism by the renowned monk, Dào Shēng (道生, 355-434), because of its despondent view of certain class of humans called *icchantikas* (translit. 一闡提), who are a group of people lacking faith and thus cannot obtain liberation throughout endless lifetimes.[109] Hodge rephrases this bleak outlook for them as the following:

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[107] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:xiii.

[108] James Legge, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms: Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fâ-Hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399 - 414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint & Dover, 1965), Back cover. Legge (1815–1897) was a linguist, missionary, sinologist, and translator who served as a representative of the London Missionary Society in Malacca and Hong Kong and was the first Professor of Chinese at Oxford University.

[109] "*icchantika*: 'one who claims; an opinionated one' … The term *icchantika* has been defined in the following ways: 'A being who, according to some Mahayana texts, is lacking in Buddha-nature or the potential for enlightenment (bodhi).' 'One who has no goodness in his nature and, therefore, no possibility of becoming a buddha.' 'This is generally understood to have been derived from *iccha* "desire." … the Icchantika are those devoted followers of hedonism either in its bad or good sense.' 'The notion of the *icchantika* (loosely rendered into English as "hedonist" or "dissipated") is the closest Buddhism comes to a notion of damnation or perdition. *Icchantika* refers to a class, or "lineage" (Sanskrit, *gotra*), of beings who are beyond all redemption and lose forever the capacity to achieve nirvāna." 'The term *icchan* originally refers to someone who is in a continual state of craving. In India the term refers to an Epicurean or a secularist. In Buddhism it refers to someone who lacks the basic causes and conditions for becoming a Buddha." Karashima Seishi, "Who Were the Icchantikas?," *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, no. 10 (2006): 72–73. Karashima (1957–2019) was Professor of Sino-Indian Buddhist Philology at the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, Tokyo.

> And make no mistake about this – the fate of the icchantikas is indeed terrifying, for the sūtra says, 'the cause of enlightenment will not be and cannot possibly be engendered in icchantikas' [唯不能令一闡提輩立菩提因。T12n0374_p0418b12-13], 'they resemble burnt seeds because they have extinguished their wholesome roots' [一闡提輩，亦復如是，雖得聞是大涅槃經，而不能發菩提因緣，猶如焦種。T12n0374_p0418b19-21] … In other words, the MPNS is quite emphatic in its view that these icchantikas will never awaken the potential of their tathāgata-garbha, never achieve liberation and never become Buddhas throughout all eternity.[110]

On the other hand, the "new and improved" version of Dharmakṣema, while retaining certain sense of the exclusion of *icchantikas* from buddhahood, makes it clear that their depravity "was a state of mind, not karmic destiny, and that buddha nature is present in all living beings without exception; the earlier teaching was just an expedient means (*upāya*) to make a point in that context." Needless to say, this milder stance won the approval of Dào Shēng along with the majority of the early Chinese Buddhists, and helped to propel this longer version to the preeminent canonical status in the history of East Asian Buddhism.[111] It is this Dharmakṣema translation that will serve as the basis of the subsequent discussions of this section.

Content-wise, according to Radich, the MPNMS encompasses several critical topics that are greatly influential in the development of East Asian Buddhism. (1) The Buddha's perinirvana is only a "docetism" because his *dharmakāya* as one of his three modes or bodies is imperishable.[112] (2) As such, his earthly journey, along with the meaning of *mokṣa* (liberation), are here treated with a new interpretation. (3) It is an esoteric teaching on *tathāgatagarbha*. (4)

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[110] Stephen Hodge, "On the Eschatology of the Mahâparinirvâṇa-Sûtra and Related Matters" (Lecture presented at University of London, SOAS, early spring 2006), https://web.archive.org/web/20171024205446/http://www.shabkar.org/download/pdf/On_the_Eschatology_of_the_Mahaparinirvana_Sutra_and_Related_Matters.pdf.

[111] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:xii–xiv.

[112] Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Docetism," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 11, 2014, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Docetism. Docetism (from δοκεῖν, "to seem") is a term originally used in Christianity to describe an early "heretical" sect which held the view that the historical Jesus Christ's physical body was "only an apparent or phantom one." Similarly, when applied to Buddhism, the term refers to the incorporeality of Siddhārtha Gautama.

The Tathāgata is described as: permanent (*nitya*), blissful (*sukha*), true self (*ātmán*), and pure (*śuddha*). (5) It also contains a number of parables about the realization of *Tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha nature.[113]

## The Incorporeality of Gautama Buddha

We have already alluded to Buddhist theory of the founder's incorporeality when discussing the Buddha's three self-natures or threefold body (*trisvabhāva*, 三自性 *sān zì xìn*) in the section about the self. Here, as abstracted from the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, incorporeality also has a positive connotation with almost the effect of deification, a status rightly conferred upon the World-honored One. Takasaki observes that, "according to the MPS [*Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*], '*mahāparinirvāṇa*' means the eternity of the *tathāgata* being *dharmakāya*, and the death of the Preceptor is merely its conventional appearance for the sake of living beings, all of whom he regards as if his only son'."[114] Radich deduces from this that "the corollary of such docetism is that the reality of the Buddha's true nature, being etc. differs in some significant respect from that appearance."[115] Within the MPNMS, the theory of incorporeality rejects all physical and natural aspects of the Buddha's earthly life, such as his birth, marriage, procreation (his son Rāhula), enjoyment of sensual pleasures, senses of hunger, thirst, pain or sickness, necessity of breathing, excrement, and even personal hygiene [since he is uncontaminated]. "These various motifs all

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[113] Radich, "Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras," 264–65.

[114] Jikido Takasaki, "The Tathagatagarbha Theory in the Mahaparinirvana-Sutra," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu)* 19, no. 2 (1971): 1023, https://doi.org/10.4259/ibk.19.1024. Takasaki (1926–2013) was a specialist in the philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism and a professor at the University of Tokyo.

[115] Michael Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, Hamburg Buddhist Studies 5 (Hamburg: Hamburg Univ. Press, 2015), 106, http://hup.sub.uni-hamburg.de/volltexte/2015/153/pdf/HamburgUP_HBS05_Radich.pdf.

concern bodily realities, and between them, they account for a significant proportion of the docetic doctrine of the passage [T12n0374_p0388c12-389b2] as a whole."[116]

The Buddha concurred with his incorporeality and explained it to the followers by saying that his passing away from them would not constitute death, because he, as all buddhas, are eternal – without beginning or end. In sum, "the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is a relatively long, fully realized Mahāyāna text, full of typical Mahāyāna elements such as mythic imagery, miracles … a fully transcendent notion of 'buddha,' metaphysics, and the rich philosophical language of emptiness."[117]

The "docetism" and "mythic imagery" propounded by Radich and Blum, respectively, can be easily spotted throughout the *Sūtra*. For example, Śākyamuni described himself as taking on the physical body only to follow the secular laws and conventions.

> 而諸人等謂是嬰兒。而我此身，無量劫來，久離是法。如來身者即是法身，非是肉血、筋脈、骨髓之所成立，隨順世間眾生法故，示為嬰兒。(T12n0374_p0388c02-05).
>
> (Translation) [When I was born] many people called me an infant. Yet, this body of mine had since countless *kalpas* departed from such dharma [the phenomenon of humanhood]. The Tathāgata's body is indeed a *dharmakāya*, not constituted of flesh or blood, sinews or veins, bones or marrow. For the reason of conforming to the dharmas of sentient beings in this world, [the body] was manifested as an infant.

In the same vein, the self-condescension of Gautama Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings is also an assumed fact:

> 雖復示現為眾生師，而心初無眾生師想，為欲拔濟諸下賤故，現入其中而為說法，非是惡業受是身也。如來正覺如是安住於大涅槃，是故名為常住無變。(T12n0374_p0390a02-05).
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> (Translation) Though, again, manifesting as a teacher of all sentient beings, I had from the beginning no such thought. Yet, for the purpose of lifting and saving all

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[116] Radich, 107–8.

[117] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:xi–xv.

> the lowly, I am shown to enter into their midst to preach the dharma to them; it was not evil karma that caused me to receive such a body. Tathāgata, the Awakened One (*samyak-saṃbodhi*) as such dwells securely in the *mahāparinirvāṇa*. Therefore he is called "permanent abiding, changeless."

To further the *Nirvāna Sūtra*'s "most central burden" in proving the eternal, unchanging buddhahood of Gautama (or of all buddhas), the MPNMS set out "to rewrite the *parinirvāṇa* (the backdrop of the entire text) so that, in effect, it never happened, and thereby to proclaim the Buddha's actual eternity," as the following passage indicates:[118]

> 我於三千大千世界或閻浮提示現涅槃，亦不畢竟取於涅槃。
> (T12n0374_p0388b22-24).
>
> (Translation) I have revealed nirvāna in the three-thousand great-thousand worlds, or in Jambudvīpa; nevertheless ultimately I do not partake in nirvāna.[119]

Naturally, then, the MPNMS also denies the ordinary conception, gestation, and birth of the Buddha. "[MPNMS] is explicitly concerned to deny the Buddha's fleshly conception and birth," it continues the above passage:[120]

> 或閻浮提示入母胎，令其父母，生我子想，而我此身，畢竟不從婬欲和合而得生也。我已久從無量劫來離於婬欲，我今此身，即是法身，隨順世間，示現入胎。善男子！此閻浮提林微尼園，示現從母摩耶而生，生已即能東行七步，唱如是言：『我於人、天、阿修羅中，最尊最上。』
> (T12n0374_p0388b24-c01).
>
> (Translation) Beside, I was shown to have enter my mother's womb in Jambudvīpa, making the parents think that they have conceived me as a son; and yet, this body of mine is ultimately not born from the intercourse of sexual craving. Since countless *kalpas*, I have long departed from sexual craving. This current body of mine is indeed a *dharmakāya*, conforming to the world, and manifesting as entering the womb. Oh, good man, in the Lumbinī garden of Jambudvīpa, it displayed my birth from Māyā, my mother, at which time of birth, I was capable of making seven strides towards the east, and sing such words: "I am the supreme and the highest among men, in heavens, and among devas (*asuras*)."

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[118] Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, 112.

[119] "choose nirvāṇa [for myself]" according to Blum's translation.

[120] Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, 116.

In positive terms, the *Nirvāna Sūtra* employs the terminologies of "*vajrakāya* (adamantine body)" and "*dharmakāya*" to ascribe incorruptibility, eternity and permanence to the Tathāgata:

> 爾時世尊復告迦葉：「善男子！如來身者，是常住身、不可壞身、金剛之身、非雜食身，即是法身。(T12n0374_p0382c27-29).
>
> (Translation) Meanwhile, the Most Honored One again spoke to Kāśyapa: Oh, good man, the Tathāgata body is a permanently abiding body, an imperishable body, an adamantine body, and not a foodstuff-ingesting body; it is indeed a *dharmakāya*.

The Buddha taught the inquirer (disciple) the reason for his ability to obtain such a permanent body:

> 佛言：「迦葉！以能護持正法因緣故,得成就是金剛身。迦葉！我於往昔護法因緣,今得成就是金剛身,常住不壞。(T12n0374_p0383b19-22).
>
> (Translation) The Buddha said: Oh, Kāśyapa, because of the ability to defend the genuine dharma's causality, one can attain a *vajrakāya*. Oh, Kāśyapa, due to my past causality of defending the dharma, I have now achieved such *vajrakāya* that is permanent and incorruptible.

The *Sūtra* expands on the Tathāgata body with a long list of nearly one hundred negative predicates (as evinced by the negation terms, 不 *bù* "not", 無 *wú* "without", 非 *fēi* "negative", 離 *lí* "apart", etc.):

> 汝今莫謂如來之身,不堅可壞,如凡夫身。善男子！汝今當知,如來之身,無量億劫堅牢難壞,非人天身、非恐怖身、非雜食身。如來之身非身,是身不生不滅、不習不修、無量無邊 … 非一非異、非像非相 … 非勇非畏、無寂不寂、無熱不熱、不可覩見、無有相貌。(T12n0374_p0383a03-21).
>
> (Translation) Now, do not say that the Tathāgata body is not strong and corruptible, just like that of the commoner. Oh, good man, now you ought to know that the Tathāgata body since countless billions of *kalpas* ago has been steadfast and incorruptible; it is not the body of human or heavenly [composition], nor a terrified body, nor a foodstuff-ingesting body. The Tathāgata body is not a body; this body is without birth or extinction, without learning or practicing, without quantization or bounds … neither unity nor differentiation, neither likeness nor characteristics … neither valiant nor fearful, without quietude, yet

> not tranquil, without heat nor warmth, utterly invisible, and lacking forms or countenance.

Thus, we see that the reader is led from the many predicates of negation to the affirmative bodily aspects of the Buddha. "*Dharmakāya-cum-vajrakāya* is thus a positive corollary to the negatively phrased denial of the reality of the impermanent, food-fed, vulnerable body of the Buddha."[121] So, in both negative and positive terms, the *Nirvāna Sūtra* unequivocally applied what we call "incorporeality" to the Buddha, effectively making him a transcendent being of the highest order.

## Buddha Nature in All Sentient Beings

Having established the incorruptibility of the Buddha, what does the MPNMS hold for the rest of the sentient beings? Optimistically, it resolutely declares the existence of the buddha nature in all of them, as delineated in the following parable of Gautama:

> 「復有比丘說：『佛祕藏甚深經典,一切眾生皆有佛性,以是性故,斷無量億諸煩惱結,即得成於阿耨多羅三藐三菩提,除一闡提。』若王大臣作如是言：『比丘汝當作佛、不作佛耶？有佛性不？』比丘答言：『我今身中定有佛性,成以不成未能審之。』王言：『大德！如其不作一闡提者,必成無疑。』比丘言：『爾,實如王言。』(T12n0374_p0404c06-11).
>
> (Translation) Again, a bhikṣu said, "The extremely profound Sūtra of the Buddha's Hidden Treasury [states that] all sentient beings possess the buddha-nature, due to which [they are able to] cut off the innumerable billions of binds of *kleśa*, and achieve *anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi* ["unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment"], with the only exception being the *icchantikas*.[122, 123] The king and the ministers then asked, "Bhikṣu, would you become a buddha or not? Do you have the buddha nature or not?" And the bhikṣu answered: "Presently within my body, the buddha nature surely exists. As to attaining buddhahood, I cannot

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[121] Radich, 132.

[122] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:35. Blum thinks this probably refers to the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*.

[123] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "阿耨多羅三耶三菩" [Unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment], by Seishi Karashima, last modified July 14, 2012, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?96.xml+id(%27b963f-8028-591a-7f85-4e09-8036-4e09-83e9%27).

> determine." The king replied, "Virtuous One, if one stays away from becoming an *icchantika*, then one indubitably must [eventually] become [a buddha]." The bhikṣu said, "Yes, it is just as the king says."

Another passage says that the voice-hearers (*śrāvakas*, "disciples") and the solitary realizers (*pratyekabuddhas*, "self-awakened ones"), though not apprehending its true meaning, do know their possession of this buddha nature. Note that here the *Sūtra* uses *tathāgatadhātu* (如來性) and then *buddhadhātu* (佛性) in place of *tathāgatagarbha*, showing that the MPNMS considers these terms to be interchangeable.

> 聲聞緣覺信順如是大涅槃經,自知己身有如來性,亦復如是。善男子！是故應當精勤修習大涅槃經。善男子！如是佛性,唯佛能知,非諸聲聞緣覺所及。(T12n0374_p0412b11-14).
>
> (Translation) Likewise, śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, believing and following this *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, are self-aware of the *tathāgatadhātu* in themselves. Oh, good man, therefore you should diligently cultivate and practice this *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. Oh, good man, such *buddhadhātu* is only truly known by buddhas, and not comprehensible by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

If all sentient beings have the buddha nature within, how does it relate to one's awakening? In the MPNMS, "*tathāgatagarbha* is also consistently realised through what we might call a 'soteriology of vision'. In other words, what liberates sentient beings to the potential buddhahood within them is the act of seeing it; and what differentiates Buddhas from all other beings, among many other things, is that only Buddhas see *tathāgatagarbha* with perfect clarity."[124] Possession is one thing, but to reach that vision of salvation is another. It certainly is no easy task to gain this true knowledge. For instance:

> 十住菩薩雖於己身見如來性，亦復如是不大明了。(T12n0374_p0412a16-17).
>
> (Translation) Although the bodhisattva at the tenth stage sees the *tathāgatadhātu* in his/her own body, s/he similarly does not fully comprehend it.

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[124] Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, 136.

The act of seeing, as mentioned here, is indeed a very critical step (or result) of one's liberation. The Buddha unambiguously informed the bodhisattva Kāśyapa about the way to attain this vision, as well as the resultant state:

> 一切眾生雖有佛性，要因持戒然後乃見，因見佛性得成阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。(T12n0374_p0405a19-21).
>
> (Translation) Even though all sentient beings have the buddha nature, they must observe precepts (*śīla-dhara*), and then they may see it. Having seen the buddha nature, they may attain *anuttarā samyaksaṃbodhi* [unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment].[125]

The *Nirvāna Sūtra* gives the commoners a ray of hope in that they all have the potential to become a buddha in the future, however arduous the path is. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons for its popularity among East Asian Buddhists throughout history.

## The Secrecy and Hiddenness of Tathāgatagarbha

As to the reason that the buddha nature is ordinarily invisible to its host, the Buddha had such explanation:

> 諸眾生身亦復如是,雖有四大毒蛇之種,其中亦有妙藥大王,所謂佛性。非是作法,但為煩惱客塵所覆,若剎利、婆羅門、毘舍、首陀,能斷除者,即見佛性成無上道。… 眾生佛性亦復如是,常為一切煩惱所覆不可得見,是故我說眾生無我;若得聞是大般涅槃微妙經典,則見佛性。… 雖聞契經一切三昧,不聞是經,不知如來微妙之相。 … 聞是經已,即知一切如來所說祕藏佛性。… 聞是經已,即知一切無量眾生皆有佛性,以是義故,說大涅槃,名為如來祕密之藏。(T12n0374_p0411b26-c11).
>
> (Translation) It is the same with the bodies of all sentient beings. Although they have the seeds of the four venomous snakes, within them are also a Great King of Marvelous Medicine, called buddha nature. It is not a dharma that is artificially made, but is covered by adventitious defilements of *kleśa*. Such person as *brahman*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra* or anyone who can eliminate [these defilements], would immediately see the buddha nature and accomplish the

[125] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "持戒" [Observe precepts], by Charles Muller, last modified November 6, 2007, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?63.xml+id(%27b6301-6212%27).

> supreme way. … It is the same with the buddha nature within sentient beings. It is constantly covered by all the *kleśas* that obscure its visibility. This is the reason that I have said that sentient beings do not possess *ātmán*. However, if they get to hear this subtle *Sūtra* of *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, they may see the buddha nature. … One may hear of all the *samādhis* in other *sūtras*, but if one does not hear this *sūtra*, one would not know the subtle and wonderful characteristics of the Tathāgata. … Having heard this *sūtra*, one would immediately know everything about the Secret Buddha Nature Treasure as expounded by the Tathāgata. … Having heard this *sūtra*, one would immediately know that all the innumerable sentient beings possess the buddha nature. Because of this significance, I speak of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, which is called the Secret Hidden Tathāgatagarbha.

Here we see several other designations for the buddha nature: the Great King of Marvelous Medicine (妙藥大王 *Miào Yiào Dà Wáng*), the Secret Buddha Nature Treasure (祕藏佛性 *Mì Zàng Fuó Xìng*), and the Secret Hidden Tathāgatagarbha (如來祕密之藏 *Rú Lái Mì Mì Zhī Zàng*). The emphasis of secrecy and hiddenness of the buddha nature in this passage is actually a prominent feature in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, in the guise of a terminological gloss, as Blum observes:

> Although the *garbha* in *tathāgatagarbha* means fetus, embryo, womb, or the inside of something, Dharmakṣema typically renders *tathāgatagarbha* as *rulai mizang* 如來祕藏 or simply *mizang*, translated here as the tathāgata's "hidden treasury." We never see a word that specifically means embryo or womb used for *garbha* in either Chinese translation of this sutra. … What we are in fact seeing in the *Nirvana Sutra* with *mizang* is not a translation but a gloss: specifically, a gloss of the notion of *tathāgatagarbha* itself as wondrous, somewhat mysterious, liberating truth about buddhas that is hidden from normal view but nonetheless knowable. At the root of this "hidden treasury" is the notion of allusiveness as expressed in the term *saṃdhāvacana* [密意言義], which occurs at least three times in the Sanskrit fragments. Rendered by Dharmakṣema as *mi jiao* 密教 , *mi yu* 密語 , or *wei mi zhi jiao* 微密之教.[126]

Judging from the MPNS, the buddha nature, or *tathāgatagarbha*, within every sentient being certainly must be well hidden in the innermost part of the being. Radich compares the available versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Mahāsūtra* and found that it is the Dharmakṣema translation that employs the terms related to secrecy most often. He concludes that the translator

[126] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:xx–xxi.

intentionally plays on the bivalent connotation of the Chinese word *藏*, which, when pronounced "cáng" is a verb meaning "to hide" and when pronounced "zàng" is a noun signifying "secret storage place." In the main *tathāgatagarbha* section, Dharmakṣema used the "vanilla" form of the term *如來藏 Rú Lái Zàng* only four times, but the "fancy" forms with "secrecy" attributes (如來祕藏 *Rú Lái Mì Zàng*, 如來祕密之藏 *Rú Lái Mì Mì Zhī Zàng*, and so forth) at least thirty five times. "Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that for [this version of the MPNMS], the main translation of *tathāgatagarbha* is 'secret store of the Tathāgata' (如來祕藏, 如來祕密之藏 etc.)." Furthermore, the *Sūtra* occasionally hints at itself being inseparably associated with this secret treasure trove by self-designations such as: 佛祕藏甚深經典 *Fuó Mì Zàng Shèn Shēn Jīng Diěn* ("The Extremely Profound *Sūtra* of The Buddha's Secret Store", T12n0374_p0404c04) and intrepidly self-proclaims: 有經名曰如來祕藏 *Yiŏ Jīng Míng Yuē Rú Lái Mì Zàng* ("There is a *sūtra* called the *Secret Tathāgatagarbha*", T12n0374_p0405c13).[127] At one point, the Buddha described his didactic methodology by gradually leading the students from the easier doctrines to the most profound:

> 如來如是於諸弟子,漸漸教學九部經法,令善通利,然後教學如來祕藏,為其子故,說如來常。如來如是說大乘典大涅槃經,為諸眾生已發心者及未發心,作菩提因，除一闡提。(T12n0374_p0420c11-15).
>
> (Translation) Similarly, to the disciples, the Tathāgata progressively teaches the nine canonical dharma *sūtras*, ensuring that they become proficient. Only then does he teach the secret *tathāgatagarbha*, to explicate the permanence of the Tathāgata for the disciples. In this way the Tathāgata speaks about the Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, to pave down the bodhi cause for all who have, or have not, resolved [to be awakened], except the *icchantikas*.

This secretive and most profound *tathāgatagarbha*, according to the above passage, is contained in this *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. To Radich, the motif of concealment is yet another

[127] Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, 194–95.

"circumstantial evidence" supporting the claim of the MPNMS being the earliest of the *tathāgatagarbha* texts. Precisely because the doctrine is so revolutionary, the author might have been concerned about its receptivity, which is a compelling motive to resort to the secrecy tactic. In contrast, other scriptures, such as the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, do not exhibit such uneasiness, perhaps because the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine might have already taken root firmly.[128]

As for the ontological status of the *tathāgatagarbha*, Zimmerman, in analyzing the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, proposes the radical concept that the standard Chinese translation for *tathāgatagarbha*, 如來藏, reveals the Chinese notion of a separate entity within. "It seems that already at the time of Buddhabhadra's translation [of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*] the general idea of *tathāgatagarbha* as an entity within living beings was so prevalent that Buddhabhadra or his collaborators decided – even against the evidence of the *sūtra* itself – to accept it for their translation into Chinese."[129] Secondly, *garbha* can also be connected to "offspring," with the insinuation of an undeveloped embryo inside a womb. And thirdly, "there is another secondary semantic field with which the term *garbha* seems to be closely associated, namely the "central part" or "essence" of something."[130]

So, in substance, both Zimmerman and Radich agree, as we have also plainly seen in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, that the *tathāgatagarbha* is shrouded in secrecy until one attains the full awakening and liberation of buddhahood so as to be able to see it clearly.

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[128] Radich, 196–97.

[129] Michael Zimmermann, *Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica*, ed. Hiroshi Kanno, vol. 6, *A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra: The Earliest Exposition of the Buddha-Nature Teaching in India* (Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka Univ., 2002), 20. Zimmermann is professor for Indian Buddhism at the Asien-Afrika-Institut of the University of Hamburg.

[130] Zimmermann, 6:41.

## Other Innovations of the Nirvāna Sūtra

Because the MPNMS introduces such revolutionary doctrine as the *tathāgatagarbha* in all sentient beings, in addition to its permanency and eternity, the *Sūtra* also naturally assume the right to claim itself as "the ultimate scripture, being the secret word (*sandha-vacana*) [*saṃdhāya-vacana* 密意言義 *mì yì yién yì*] of the Tathagata."[131] In this vein, a remarkable point of the passage quoted previously is the claim of superiority over other *sūtras*, in that they do not reveal the buddha nature in all sentient beings. The pertinent section is reproduced below:

> 眾生佛性亦復如是,常為一切煩惱所覆不可得見,是故我說眾生無我;若得聞是大般涅槃微妙經典,則見佛性。… 雖聞契經一切三昧,不聞是經,不知如來微妙之相。 … 聞是經已,即知一切如來所說祕藏佛性。… 聞是經已,即知一切無量眾生皆有佛性,以是義故,說大涅槃,名為如來祕密之藏。
> (T12n0374_p0411c03-c11)

> (Translation) It is the same with the buddha nature within sentient beings. It is constantly covered by all the *kleśas* that obscure its visibility. This is the reason that I have said that sentient beings do not possess *ātmán*. However, if they get to hear this subtle *Sūtra* of *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, they may see the buddha nature. … One may hear of all the *samādhis* in other *sūtras*, but if one does not hear this *sūtra*, one would not know the subtle and wonderful characteristics of the Tathāgata. … Having heard this *sūtra*, one would immediately know everything about the Secret Buddha Nature Treasure as expounded by the Tathāgata. … Having heard this *sūtra*, one would immediately know that all the innumerable sentient beings possess the buddha nature. Because of this significance, I speak of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, which is called the Secret Hidden Tathāgatagarbha.

This assertion indirectly tells the reader that the author of the *Nirvāna Sūtra* did not know of other *sūtras* containing the same teaching, implying that the MPNMS might actually be the earliest among the *tathāgatagarbha* scriptures, even prior to the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, contra the common scholarly consensus. Radich has been the proponent of such early dating: "I argue that we are best to regard the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra* ('MPNMS') as our earliest extant text propounding *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine. … Available evidence may ultimately be inconclusive,

[131] Jikido Takasaki, "The Tathagatagarbha Theory in the Mahaparinirvana-Sutra," 1023.

but in the balance, makes it most likely that MPNMS is our earliest *tathāgatagarbha* scripture."[132]

Another note-worthy issue is the relegation of the *anātman* (no-self) doctrine to a status of *upāya-pravacana* (provisional explanation, 方便說 *fāng bièn shuō*), due to the ordinary concealment of the buddha nature under adventitious defilements. As seen earlier, this type of relegation has been a convenient device for the authors of *sūtras* or *śāstras* to introduce new or even revolutionary concepts, which seemingly contradict previously customary doctrines, without actually overriding or negating the established teaching. In this regard, even the quintessential Buddhist philosophy of *śūnyatā* occasionally must give way to other innovations, as what occurred in the MPNMS. For instance, Gautama Buddha, prior to his impending *parinirvāna*, admonished his disciples not to be sorrowful. He encouraged them with his words of wisdom about the true essence of the *śūnyatā* doctrine:

> 復次比丘！若有疑念,今皆當問。若空、不空,若常、無常,若苦、不苦 … 如是等種種法中有所疑者,今應諮問,我當隨順為汝斷之，亦當為汝先說甘露，然後乃當入於涅槃。(T12n0374_p0376b09-15).
>
> (Translation) Moreover, bhikṣus, if there is any thought of doubt, you should ask now. [Dharmas such as:] apparent *śūnyatā*, yet *aśūnya*; apparent permanency, yet impermanent; apparent sorrow, yet not sorrowful; … if doubts arise concerning these dharmas, you should inquire about them now. I shall appropriately cut them off (or provide judgment of them) for you, and also elucidate the sweet nectars for you, before entering nirvāna.

In this regard, the *Nirvāna Sūtra* gives a completely new interpretation of *śūnyatā* as *aśūnya*, again shown in the following excerpt:

> 又解脫者,名不空空,空空者名無所有,無所有者,即是外道尼犍子等所計解脫,而是尼犍實無解脫,故名空空;真解脫者則不如是,故不空空,不空空者即真解脫，真解脫者即是如來。(T12n0374_p0395b14-18).

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[132] Radich, *The Mahāparinirvāṇa-Mahāsūtra and the Emergence of Tathāgatagarbha Doctrine*, 13.

> (Translation) Furthermore, *mokṣa* (liberation) is called the *aśūnya śūnyatā* (nonempty emptiness). If it is *śūnya śūnyatā* (empty emptiness), it should be called nothingness; if nothingness is upheld, it is the liberation surmised by the likes of Nirgrantha heretics; in reality the Nirgranthas do not have liberation; thus [they render] the name, *śūnya śūnyatā*. True *mokṣa* is not so; hence it is called *aśūnya śūnyatā*; such nonempty emptiness is true liberation, and true liberation precisely is Tathāgata.

In another place, the *Sūtra* provides a series of equations linking together several *tathāgata-garbha*-related terms:

> 三歸依故則得安樂,受安樂者即真解脫,真解脫者即是如來。如來者即是涅槃,涅槃者即是無盡,無盡者即是佛性,佛性者即是決定,決定者即是阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。(T12n0374_p0395c14-17).

> (Translation) Due to the three refuges, sentient beings receive peace and joy. Receiving peace and joy is true *mokṣa*. True *mokṣa* is the Tathāgata. The Tathāgata is nirvāna. Nirvāna is infinity. Infinity is *buddhadhātu*. *Buddhadhātu* is determination. And determination is *anuttarā saṃyaksaṃbodhi*.

The notion of *dhātu* is an innovation by the author of the MPNS, as Takasaki concludes: "The term *buddhadhātu* (or *tathāgatadhātu*), which is not appreared [sic. appeared] in the TGS, the *Anūnatvāpūrṇatvanirdeśa* (AAN) and the *Śrīmālāsūtra* (SMS), the three basic scriptures on the TG theory, seems to be used for the first time in the MPS. Thus the TG theory in the MPS will be defined as the theory of '*dhātu-astitva*' [nature-being]."[133]

Therefore, the MPNS, especially the Dharmakṣema translation, can be described as a *sūtra* full of innovative concepts (contrary to Sally King's assertion), most of which is conceivably introduced by the translator for the purpose of indigenization. If so, the widespread successful canonical status that the *Sūtra* enjoys in East Asian Buddhism probably has already far exceeded his original expectation.

In conclusion, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is an "optimistic" Buddhist scripture due to its "leveling of the playing field" for the non-awakened ones by the assertion that all sentient beings

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[133] Jikido Takasaki, “The Tathagatagarbha Theory in the Mahaparinirvana-Sutra,” 1022.

possess the buddha nature. As a comparison, Theravada Buddhism reserves the name, Buddha, for Sakyamuni (the present Buddha), Metteyya (Skt. Maitreya, the future Buddha), and twenty seven mythical past Buddhas, suggesting the unattainability of buddhahood for ordinary beings.[134] But, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, buddhahood is a built-in, innate nature in all sentient beings. However much it is under the concealment of adventitious defilements, however difficult it is to remove these covers, the *tathāgatagarbha* is, nevertheless, a realizable potential for attaining buddhahood. By giving it different appellations – *mokṣa*, Tathāgata, *nirvāna*, *buddhadhātu*, *anuttarā saṃyaksaṃbodhi*, and *tathāgatadhātu* – the *Sūtra* "drives home" the proclamation that the secret treasure-store is a reality in all sentient beings (with the only possible exception of *icchantikas*), as spontaneously existent as one's own personality. Such positivity also extends to the declaration of this buddha nature as "eternal, blissful, characterized by a personal self, and pure. Thus everyone has the potential for liberation, for realizing nirvāṇa and buddhahood."[135]

## *Chapter Conclusion*

This chapter is an exploration on the Buddhist doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*. Since the term is also called "the Eighth Consciousness" by many schools, we first examined what "consciousness" means in Buddhism. The school most well known for its emphasis on consciousness is none other than the so-called "Consciousness-Only," Yogācāra school, which arose as a response to the problematics surrounding the issue of the continuation of one's consciousness within the endless cycles of *saṃsāra*. The solution afforded by the Yogācārins is

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[134] Kate Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism: Continuity, Diversity and Identity* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 34, ProQuest Ebook Central. Crosby is Professor of Buddhist Studies in the department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College in London.

[135] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:xv.

to subdivide the human psyche into two classes: six types of "cognitive awareness," and a seventh "store consciousness," or *ālaya-vijñāna*, which is a substratum of the human mind, flowing in an incessant stream across myriads of lifetimes. As the Yogācāra theories progressed, an additional consciousness was inserted in between the original two classes. The *kliṣṭa-manas* ("afflictive mentation") was proposed as a mechanism that erroneously treats the *ālaya-vijñāna* as *ātmán* (true self), making the *ālaya-vijñāna* the eighth consciousness. Especially relevant to our discussion is Yogācāra's strong insistence on the non-substantiality of the *ātmán*, rendering the school quite incompatible with our main theme, the Christian Inner Person.

The Yogācāra scriptures were imported and translated into Chinese by pilgrims such as Xuán Zàng, whose work helped to establish the so-called Chinese Yogācāra school, Fǎ Xiàng. This Chinese Idealistic school enjoyed a brief popularity, but in rejecting the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine in favor of the *gotra* supposition, it lost its appeal for the Chinese audience, and thus was soon displaced by other new schools that emphasized the *tathāgatagarbha* or *buddhadhātu* as an innate nature in all sentient beings.

The consciousness of one's own existence is intimately related to the concept of "self." In opposition to (and competition against) Brahmanism, Buddhism advocated the *anātman* (non-self) doctrine, a denial of the permanent self-nature. The ultimate Buddhist soteriological goal of awakening can be described as the realization of the self "as it is." The self, at least in early Indian Buddhism, is impermanent, and both a cause and a fruit of karma. The Yogācārins systemized this *anātman* philosophy with a series of treatises called the *vijñaptimātratā* (consciousness only). For them, the self consists of a continuous stream of "momentary consciousnesses and other mental factors," in which the *ālaya-vijñāna* has a central role as the

storage of karmic seeds. The buddhas, then, are ones who have transformed their consciousnesses into a special, transcendental knowledge called *lokôttara-jñāna*.

When transmitted to China, in order to take root firmly, Buddhism needed to go through the screening of the indigenous Chinese religions, mainly Daoism, which also has the tendency of Indian eternalists to uphold an imperishable soul or spirit in humans. Such localized concepts inevitably percolated into the translation of Sanskrit *sūtras*. But it was the school of Chán that greatly expanded the conception of the self with its various modes of awakening in combination with the practice of *dhyāna*/meditation. Regardless of their views on attaining nirvāna, the three major sects of Chán school all agreed on the existence of the true nature within all sentient beings. This true nature is considered the equivalent of buddha nature, *tathāgatagarbha*, the mind of all sentient beings, etc, which is one's "true self," and bears the characteristics of being permanent, imperishable, beginningless, eternal, and originally pure, among others. When later transmitted to other East Asian countries, this notion of the self became the de facto standard feature of Buddhism in this part of the world.

If the true, innate self does exist, for Buddhism it can be none other than the buddha nature. The namesake work, *Buddha Nature Treatise*, divides the buddha nature into three non-natures and three positive ones – the discriminating nature, the relative nature, and the true nature, in the order of importance. Ultimately, all three natures can be concentrated into the relative nature, as it can be defiled by discrimination, and purified by true nature. When completely purified, only the true nature remains, which represents the most lucid and genuine projection of the buddha nature. In such state, the person would be considered to have attained full awakening.

Buddha nature ultimately is equated with *tathāgatagarbha*, a concept that originated in Indian Buddhism. The term encompasses three aspects: as a universal reality, as an individual embryonic potential, or as the dharma body of Tathātā (the *dharmakāya*) in all sentient beings. The early *sūtras* collectively or separately illustrate these major characteristics of the *tathāgatagarbha*: eternal, abiding in all sentient beings, normally covered by adventitious defilements, simultaneously non-empty and empty, unconditioned, identical with Buddha-Dharmas, being the womb of the dharmas and dharma body, transcendental, inherently pure, equivalent to both the *Dharmadhātu* and the *sattvadhātu*, unborn and imperishable (having an adamantine body), unlimited by the past or the future, uncreated, and synonymous with *tathāgatadhātu* and *buddhadhātu*.

In particular, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* vigorously upholds the incorporeality of the Buddha as a transcendent being. It also posits unequivocally the existence of *tathāgatagarbha* within all sentient beings, providing them the possibility to be awakened by "seeing" their own, inherent buddha nature. Especially highlighted in this *Sūtra* is the secret attribute of the *Tathāgatagarbha*, with the implication of it being a separate entity, revising or supplementing the customary *anātman* teaching, along with the *śūnyatā* doctrine.

The following serves as a summary of some important attributes of the *Tathāgatagarbha*, as gleaned from the texts used in this chapter.

**Self-Existence**: The Tathāgatagarbha was not created, but is eternally existent, unborn, and unceasing.

**True Suchness (*Bhūtatathatā*):** The emphasis here is on its truthfulness and unchangeability. This attribute also implies the aforementioned self-existing nature of *Tathāgatagarbha*.

**Non-empty Emptiness (*Aśūnya Śūnyatā*):** As applied to *Tathāgatagarbha*, the *śūnya* nature does not imply void or emptiness, but, on the contrary, non-empty emptiness, because it is seemingly empty, but in reality not so.

**Procreativeness:** Being "the basis, the support, and the foundation," the *Tathāgatagarbha* is the first and fundamental cause, the root and source of the universe; all dharmas are its creation. "This true nature, called *foxing* (佛性 Buddha-nature), *rulaizang* (如來藏 *tathāgatagarbha*), *zhongshengxin* (眾生心 the mind of living beings), *zhenwo* (真我 true self), etc., has the characteristics of … creating everything."[136]

**Non-self (*Anātman*):** Selflessness paradoxically signifies the true Self. *Anātman* is explicitly taught, but *ātmán* is the implicit, untold meaning.

**Defilement and Purity:** The essence *Tathāgatagarbha* is originally pure, but as a store-house consciousness, *ālaya-vijñāna* contains seeds of defilement within, which cause the endless cycles of *saṃsāra*.

**Hiddenness:** *Tathāgatagarbha* is normally hidden under layers of defilement. Thus the need to exhaust one's resources to find/see it; once found/seen, the realm attained is the so-called enlightenment and awakening of the mind.

**All-Pervasiveness:** *Ālaya-vijñāna* exists in all sentient beings without exception.

The various concepts about the *Tathāgatagarbha* presented in this chapter will serves as our model of illumination for the next chapter of comparison between the Inner Person of Christianity and the *Tathāgatagarbha* of Buddhism.

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[136] Park, *How Buddhism Acquired a Soul on the Way to China*, 220.

# CHAPTER 5. EXAMINING THE MEANINGS OF THE INNER PERSON FROM A COMPARATIVIST PERSPECTIVE

Having defined the Christian New Testament concept of the Inner Person, and set up the model of illumination from the *Tathāgatagarbha* notion in Buddhism, we now are ready for a comparative study between the two traditions. Our first task is to lay down the differences between the two sides, especially between Christianity and Indian Buddhism, as the latter has a very different view of the self that is well nigh "nonexistent." This contrast will hopefully bring us better, more convincing parallels when we discuss the similarities in the subsequent parts of this chapter. An important note that cannot be stressed enough is that when discussing the similarities between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Christianity, there will not be any haphazard, inferential attempt to equate the two sides, since too much cultural, historical, geographical, and linguistic background data are at risk of being ignored or distorted. This project is strictly for the enhancement of mutual understanding between the two vastly diverse traditions, from the aspect of the Inner Person.

## *Christianity in Contrast with Buddhism*

Conceivably, one of the greatest divides between Buddhism and Christianity is in their soteriological modes: autosoteriological (salvation by self effort – works) vs. heterosoteriological (salvation by the Other – faith), which is due to the fact of the perceived impression of atheism vs. theism, respectively. This difference is especially prominent with the earlier, more original Indian Buddhism, known as Nikāya Buddhism. Later, the Yogācāra school brought the two sides

a little closer by the strong emphasis on consciousness. And then, Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly after entering China, blurred the lines of demarcation even further.

## Nikāya Buddhism

Without any supramundane deities as saviors, Buddhism, at least in its oldest Indian form, naturally had to derive the human salvation from within mankind's own power. "Traditionally, people have considered 'atheism' to be one of the chief characteristics of the teaching of the Buddha according to the Lesser Vehicle [Hīnayāna, or Nikāya Buddhism]. This view is doubtless correct. Another feature often emphasized in addition to atheism is its autosoteriology, the belief that each individual stands on his own feet and must accomplish his own salvation."[1] The rationalistic Nikāya Buddhists, with their "much-noted cool and abstract way of thinking," portrayed their founder, Siddhārtha Gautama, as "a master who fundamentally had no metaphysical nobility that would in any way have elevated him above the other creatures," and who was only a wise human teacher preaching *mokṣa* since he was "a *primus inter pares* [first among equals]."[2]

As regarding the self, Theravāda or Nikāya Buddhism adheres to the *Abhidhamma* philosophy, which is concerned with "ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca*)," not "conventional truth (*saṃvuti-sacca*)." The latter kind of truth deals with the normal, customary human experiences and expressions that reference the individual's own being as "self." However, the *Abhidhamma* school of thought denies the existence of the self in the ultimate sense:

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[1] Joachim Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Gregory D. Alles (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 42. Wach (1898–1955), a German-American theologian, served as a professor of the history of religion at the University of Leipzig, and then at the University of Chicago before passing. "Wach contributed significantly to the field of study that became known as the sociology of religion." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Joachim Wach,” accessed June 12, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joachim-Wach.

[2] Wach, 43.

> *Abhidhamma* breaks such concepts and analyzes down further into constituents or factors of reality called *dhamma*. Such *dhamma* are categorized into unconditioned reality and conditioned reality, the former being *Nibbāna*, the state of enlightenment. As unconditioned, *Nibbāna* is not subject to causality, impermanence, or the other laws of *saṃsāra*. It is beyond time and beyond *saṃsāra*. The other *dhamma*, while conditioned, are nonetheless considered to really exist in Theravada. In Indian philosophical terms, they have *svabhāva* – "own being," yet are empty (*suñña*) of self (*attā*) in that they are conditioned. The self, *attā*, being dismissed in this context is the concept of an enduring, independently existent entity.[3]

Therefore, in early Indian Buddhism, the only permanent, unchanging "entity" is a state of being called *Nirvāna*, which should realistically be considered a non-substantial "non-entity," since it is only a status or state. Such theory begs the question that when an individual enters this state of *Nirvāna*, what would be the ontological status of the person? If a fully enlightened human is extricated out of the *saṃsāra* cycles, as the definition of *Nirvāna* dictates, is he (never a "she") permanent and unchanging? Has he transitioned from a dependent, substantial being into an unconditioned, unsubstantial non-being? As such, this enigmatic realm called *Nirvāna* completely surpasses our comprehension. A full exhibition of the problematics associated with the Theravādan concept of liberation is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice it to say that "the literal connotations of [the word *Nirvāna* or *Enlightenment*] are both 'bliss' and 'extinction.'"[4] Before one reaches that stage, the human existence is characterized by *svabhāva* (Chn. 自有 self-existent, or 自性 self-nature/intrinsic existence/inherent existence), which, contrary to intuition, is devoid of the self for the Theravādans.[5] A good example would be the *anātman* proposition of Nāgārjuna, which conceives of the *svabhāva* nothing more than a delusion:

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[3] Crosby, *Theravada Buddhism*, 182. Italics original.

[4] Crosby, 16.

[5] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "自有" [Self-existent], by Charles Muller, last modified August 4, 2011, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?81.xml+id(%27b81ea-6709%27).

> In the MADHYAMAKA school, [*svabhāva*] refers to a hypostatized and reified nature that is falsely attributed to phenomena by ignorance, such that phenomena are mistakenly conceived to exist in and of themselves. In this sense, it is used as a synonym for ĀTMAN. Therefore, there is no svabhāva, nothing possesses svabhāva, and all phenomena are said to lack, or be empty of, svabhāva. This doctrine is sufficiently central to Madhyamaka that the school is also called NIHSVABHĀVAVĀDA, the "Proponents of No Svabhāva."[6]

Naturally, this view of denying the existence of the self or intrinsic nature is quite incompatible with the Inner Person of New Testament that affirms the existence of a "true self," as "personal being" (see chapter two, subsection "True Self").

## Yogācāra Philosophy

In the Buddhism chapter, we have seen that Yogācāra considers the Eighth Consciousness, *Ālaya-Vijñāna*, as being permanently bound by defilements, which is the miserable condition of all unenlightened beings. To achieve liberation, one must evoke a process called *āśraya parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis, 轉依 *zhuǎn yī*) to destroy this "corrupt nature." It is stated in the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* (瑜伽師地論):

> 轉依無間當言已斷阿賴耶識。由此斷故當言已斷一切雜染。(T30n1579_p0581c03-08).

> When the transformation of the basis is incessant, it should be said that *Ālaya-Vijñāna* has been severed. With it severed, it should be said that all defilements have also been cut off.

Also, recall that this important soteriological concept of *āśraya parāvṛtti* in the Yogācāra school is defined as: "the transmutation of the defiled state in which one has not abandoned the afflictions (*kleśa* [煩惱 *fán nǎo*]) into a purified state in which the *kleśas* have been abandoned. This transmutation thus transforms an ordinary person (*pṛthagjana* [凡夫人 *fán fū rén*]) into a

[6] Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. "Svabhāva." Italics original.

noble one (*ārya* [聖人 *shèng rén*])."[7] The introduction of this concept provides some comparative grounds with Christianity.

*Similarities with Christianity*

At first blush, the above Yogācāra philosophy gives the impression of close proximity to the doctrine of sin and redemption in Christianity. For instance, the permanently defiled state of *ālaya-vijñāna* is a reminder of the Christian notion of the fallen human state of sin, which is also a total corruption beyond repair, at least in the Reformed Calvinistic understanding ("Total depravity" is what the first letter of the acronym, TULIP, the so-called Five Points of Calvinism, stands for, which asserts that "all humans are depraved and totally helpless to save themselves apart from the grace of God.").[8]

Another similarity consists in the need for humans to completely transform or counteract this defiled, sinful nature, as a requirement for their salvation or liberation. For Yogācāra, it is the *ālaya-vijñāna*, which stores all the karmic seeds of *kleśa*, that needs to be transmutated, or even severed/abandoned, to effect a new, Ninth Consciousness – the *amala-vijñāna* (如來識 *rú lái shì*, 淨識 *jìng shì*, 無垢識 *wú gò shì*, 無漏識 *wú lò shì*, 第九識 *dì jiǒ shì*), or "pure-consciousness." Essentially, the *amala-vijñāna* is a new undefiled consciousness engendered by and in those who have successfully completed the process of *āśraya parāvṛtti*, a fundamental transformation. Similarly, in the Christian New Testament, a "new life" is the result of one who has gone through the transformation of being born again (cf. The Gospel of John, Chapter 3). In

[7] Buswell and Lopez, s.v. "Āśrayaparāvṛtti." Added Chinese translation in brackets.

[8] David Lewis Allen and Steve Lemke, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 6. Allen is professor of Preaching, director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching and dean of the School of Theology, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. Lemke is provost and professor of Philosophy and Ethics, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana.

this comparison, the old human nature would correspond to the *ālaya-vijñāna*, and the new life, to the *amala-vijñāna*.

A third parallel can be drawn on the result of this life transition. Those who have been transformed becomes noble persons (*āryas*), which is translated, 聖人 *shèng rén*, in Chinese, meaning "saints." The *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* describes them in the salvific respect as: "於現法中永斷一切所有雜染。如是解脫唯諸聖者方能獲得。故此解脫名聖解脫" (T30n1579_ p0858b10-11). Translation: "In existing dharmas, they have forever severed every and all defilements/afflictions.[9] Such *mokṣa* may only be attained by the *āryas*. Therefore, this *mokṣa* is called saintly liberation." Correspondingly, both the Christian Old and New Testaments also call the people of God, saints: "He will keep the feet of His saints …" (1 Samuel 2:9); "… the saints that are in the earth …" (Psalm 16:3); "… bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matthew 27:52); "… Thy saints at Jerusalem" (Acts 9:13); "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called saints …" (Romans 1:7).

### *Dissimilarities with Christianity*

These somewhat comparable concepts in Yogācāra Buddhism and Christianity should not be taken too far, however, because great disparities still exist between them. For one thing, the *ālaya-vijñāna* that stores all karmic seeds is a beginningless consciousness, unlike the human original sin of Christianity, which began with the disobedience of the first Parents. Sinful nature had a beginning; from then on, it became a permanent part of humans, and it necessitates the redemption of God.

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[9] 雜染 (*zá rǎn*, defilements/afflictions): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "雜染" [Defiled], by Charles Muller, last modified January 12, 2018, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?96.xml+id(%27b96dc-67d3%27).

Secondly, *ālaya-vijñāna* is a morally neutral "agent" responsible only for the storage of causal seeds and manifestation of karmic results. It does not distort or coerce human wills into certain acts, but it acts as an ultimate "justice," in that the types of acts committed will eventually reap their due recompense. In contrast, sin in Christianity is a morally negative property residing in mankind, constantly leading them away from God in their actions and thoughts. Sin does not, by itself, punish the evil doer, nor reward anyone for good deeds. But God is the ultimate and final Judge of all persons.

Thirdly, the mode of salvation is fundamentally different. Whereas in Yogācāra, the "basis" needs to be transformed so as to eliminate *ālaya-vijñāna* (or convert it into *amala-vijñāna*), a process essentially implying the extinguishing of the deepest part of the original human nature, in the New Testament, salvation transpires at the moment one is born again, when the believer receives the Holy Spirit into his/her heart by believing and confessing in Christ.[10] Furthermore, in Pauline theology, the Inner Person progressively matures to overshadow the outward, decaying physical body that eventually dies; but at the end, God will raise His people up from death and cloth them with incorruption and immortality.[11] At least according to the Calvinists, the "totally corrupt" postlapsarian (lit. "after the fall") human nature simply has no self-possessed ability to return back to God and obtain His favor that ultimately constitutes salvation. It is not surprising that this teaching is considered by many to be "the second most hated doctrine," next to "the doctrine of the exclusivity of Christ in salvation."[12] Naturally, such deterministic view of humanity creates schisms: "If there is one thing that separates the

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[10] Romans 10:9: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

[11] 1 Corinthians 15:51-53: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

[12] Allen and Lemke, *Whosoever Will*, 29.

conservative from the liberal it is his view of human nature. The conservative sees man as born in a broken state. This tragic view of human nature sees man as selfish and hedonistic by design."[13] In sum, the Theravāda scheme of salvation is a type of conversion of consciousness, effected through human effort, but the Christian redemptive concept consists in divine intervention, assistance, and substitution, with little moral obligation left on the part of mankind, except to accept the salvation wholeheartedly through faith, which, arguably, arose also due to supramundane cause – thus the doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace, also part of the TULIP of Calvinism.[14]

Fourthly, the conception of "saint" is drastically different between the two traditions. Other than moral perfection, the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* also attributes supernatural capabilities to them:

> 又諸聖者引發所有最勝神通。隨所願樂延諸壽行。或住一劫或一劫餘。(T30n1579_p0862c25-26).
>
> (Translation) Again, saints may invoke all the most superior supranormal powers (*abhijñās*), extending their life spans as they please, whether for one kalpa or in excess of one kalpa.[15]

On the other hand, the Biblical concept of being a "saint" is centered in "separation," rather than moral perfection, as commonly conceived. "If a person , activity, or thing is separated

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[13] Mike Adams, "The Nature of Conservatism," Townhall, May 18, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20210623020454/https://townhall.com/columnists/mikeadams/2009/05/18/the-nature-of-conservatism-n1351787. "By design" is certainly unbiblical, because the Scripture teaches that human depravity came from the "fall," which in turn is a human act of the will, exercised in disobedience against God.

[14] Allen and Lemke, *Whosoever Will*, 6.

[15] "In Sanskrit, 'superknowledges'; specifically referring to a set of supranormal powers that are by-products of meditation. These are usually enumerated as six: (1) various psychical and magical powers … sometimes also known as 'unimpeded bodily action'; (2) clairvoyance, lit. 'divine eye', the ability to see from afar and to see how beings fare in accordance with their deeds; (3) clairaudience, lit. 'divine ear', the ability to hear from afar; (4) the ability to remember one's own former lives; (5) 'knowledge of others' states of mind', e.g., telepathy; and (6) the knowledge of the extinction of the contaminants." Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. "Abhijñā."

unto God and for God, the Bible also calls it holy, being separated unto holiness."[16] And "to 'sanctify' [the verb form of "saint"] is simply 'to separate unto God.'"[17] The Chinese Unified Version of the Bible mostly translates the word "to sanctify/consecrate/hallow" (Heb. קָדַשׁ; Grk. ἁγιάζω) as "分別為聖," literally "to set apart as holy" (e.g., Exodus 13:2; 28:3; Leviticus 22:1, 3; Numbers 3:13; John 10:36, 17:19, etc.). Other than the moral aspect, the Christian "saint" certainly does not imply any superhuman powers or special status on earth. On the contrary, the New Testament saints are usually mistreated, persecuted, and despised in the world: "… many of the saints did I shut up in prison …" (Acts 26:10), "… contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem" (Romans 15:26), "For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets …" (Revelation 16:6). One of the underlying reasons for their persecutions is explained by Jesus: "… The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you …" (John 15:20). But Jesus also foretold the saints' future glory: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). Likewise, the apostle Paul spoke of the generally humble condition of the saints: " … not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:26-27). All of these miserable conditions of the Christian saints in the world are not comparable to the Yogācāra concept of "saint."

Lastly, and most critically, regarding the Inner Person, the Yogācāra doctrines just do not seem congruous with Pauline theology. The most difficult hurdle would be that Yogācāra, at

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[16] Witness Lee, *The Experience of Life* (Anaheim, CA.: Living Stream Ministry, 1994), 89. The word, holy, is in many respect directly equivalent to "saint."

[17] Danny Clark and Zachary Clark, *The Contradiction of God: Why Everything You Thought You Knew about God Is Wrong* (New Braunfels, TX: Danny Clark, 2014), 45.

least in the early, Indian form, is very emphatic about the *śūnya* nature of the self, meaning that it denies the *Ātmán* self any reality. We have mentioned in the previous chapter that the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi Śāstra* (成唯識論 *Chéng Wéi Shì Luèn*, lit. "Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only"), begins by clearly stating its purpose as the elimination of delusions on the reality of the self and the material world. The *Śāstra* starts out with:

> 稽首唯識性，滿分清淨者。我今釋彼說,利樂諸有情。今造此論,為於二空有迷謬者生正解故。生解為斷二重障故,由我法執二障具生,若證二空彼障隨斷。斷障為得二勝果故,由斷續生煩惱障故證真解脫，由斷礙解所知障故得大菩提。(T31n1585_p0001a07-12).

> (Translation) Bowing my head in prostration to both the perfectly and the partially clarified about *vijñapti-mātratva* (the nature of consciousness-only), I now explain the doctrine for the benefits and enjoyment of all sentient beings.[18] The present treatise is written for the purpose of engendering the right conception in those who do not understand, or have misunderstood, the two *śūnyatās* (*dvayâbhāva*).[19] To have the right conceptions is for the purpose of eliminating the two severe obstructions (*āvaraṇa-dvaya* or *dvidhā-dauṣṭhulya*).[20] Clinging to the self and phenomena (*pudgala-dharma*), both of the two obstructions are produced.[21] If one may realize the two *śūnyatās*, said obstructions will then be eliminated. The purpose of cutting off the obstructions is to attain the two surpassing achievements (*viśeṣa-phala*) – from cutting off the continuously arising obstruction of *kleśa* (affliction), one thus realizes true *mokṣa* (liberation); from eliminating the wisdom-impeding obstruction of cognitive hindrances

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[18] "The doctrine" is generally thought to refer to Vasubundhu's *Triṃśikā-vijñaptimātratā* (唯識三十論頌 Wéishí Sānshí Lùen Sòng), *Thirty Verses on Manifestation Only*.

[19] 二空 (*èr kōng*, two *śūnyatās*, two emptinesses): "Basic Meaning: two kinds of emptiness; Senses: Two kinds of selflessness, also written 二無我, 人法二空. Selflessness of phenomena 法空 and selflessness of person 人空 (also called 生空, 我空). … Emptiness of essence 體空 (性空) and emptiness of aspects 相空." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "二空" [Two kinds of emptiness], by Charles Muller, last modified October 25, 2009, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e8c-7a7a%27).

[20] 二障 (*èr zhàng*, *āvaraṇa-dvaya* or *dvidhā-dauṣṭhulya* , two severe obstructions): "Basic Meaning: two hindrances; Senses: 'two obstructions,' 'two impediments,' etc. These are the afflictive hindrances (*kleśâvaraṇa* 煩惱障) and the cognitive hindrances (*jñeyâvaraṇa*; also interpreted as 'hindrances of the knowable' ). Xuanzang rendered cognitive hindrances as 所知障, with the earlier rendering (in both Yogâcāra and Tathāgatagarbha works) being 智障." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "二障" [Two hindrances], by Charles Muller, last modified March 29, 2017, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e8c-969c%27).

[21] 我法 (*wǒ fǎ*, *pudgala-dharma*, self and phenomena): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "我法" [Self and phenomena], by Charles Muller, last modified November 3, 2007, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?62.xml+id(%27b6211-6cd5%27).

(*jñeyâvaraṇa*), one thus realizes the great enlightenment (*abhisaṃbodhi*).[22, 23, 24, 25]

Right at the onset, the *Śāstra* explicitly states one of its major themes – that of explicating the universal but serious human hindrances to enlightenment, *viz*., afflictive and cognitive hindrances. The root of these obstructions is the grasping of the self and of phenomena (*dharmas*). What does "grasping" (*abhiniveśa* 執) signify? Muller defines the concept as "refer(ing) mainly to grasping to things in a conceptual sense—holding on to the perceptions one experiences and one's views regarding such perceptions."[26] The *Śāstra* does not give us an outright definition, but it does provide us the ultimate goal that the pilgrim of enlightenment should be aiming for: realizing that both objects of grasping are empty – *śūnya*. It means that the author considered *śūnyatā* to be the highest truth, in line with the teachings of the Buddha. To further drive home the concept of emptiness, the *Śāstra* continues:

> 論曰：世間聖教說有我法，但由假立，非實有性。我謂主宰,法謂軌持,彼二俱有種種相轉。(T31n1585_p0001a23-25).
>
> (Translation) The *Treatise* (of Vasubundhu) states: the holy teachings of the secular world assert the existence of the self and phenomena (*pudgala-dharma*); but it is only a metaphor (*upacāra*), and does not have the nature of real

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[22] 勝果 (*shèng guǒ*, *viśeṣa-phala*, surpassing achievements): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "勝果" [Excellent realization], by Charles Muller, last modified May 7, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?52.xml+id(%27b52dd-679c%27).

[23] 所知障 (*suǒ zhī zhàng*, *jñeyâvaraṇa*, cognitive hindrances): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "所知障" [Cognitive hindrances], by Charles Muller, last modified January 12, 2015, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?62.xml+id(%27b6240-77e5-969c%27).

[24] 大菩提 (*dà pú tí*, *abhisaṃbodhi*, great enlightenment): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "大菩提" [Great enlightenment], by Charles Muller, last modified October 9, 2007, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?59.xml+id(%27b5927-83e9-63d0%27).

[25] My translation in reference to the Chinese commentary: 羅時憲 Luó Shí Xiàn, *《成唯識論》講記 Commentary on* Chen Wei Shi Luen (Hong Kong: Dharmalakshana Buddhist Dharma Spreading Resource, 2015), 117–29. 羅時憲 Luó Shí Xiàn (1914–1993) was professor at Sun Yat-Sen University and Koumin University of Kwangtun, and the founder of The Dharmalakshana Buddhist Institute.

[26] Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "執" [To grasp], by Charles Muller, last modified July 7, 2021, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?57.xml+id(%27b57f7%27).

> existence.[27] The self is called the sovereign ruler; while *dharma* is called form and sustention; the two (self and *dharma*) both have various characteristics arisen.[28]

Here, more specifically, both the self and *dharma* are put on the equal footing of "linguistic convention," which is without real existence, because both the self as the dominant lord and the *dharma* as form and continuation have many different manifestations, meaning they can never be permanent, unchanging realities. In his introduction to the translation of Xuán Zàng's works, Cook remarks on the Yogācāra concept of perceiving reality:

> The theory of the *Ch'eng wei-shih lun* is that basic or fundamental consciousness (*mūla- vijñāna*) comes to appear naturally and spontaneously in the form of a seeing part (*darśana- bhāga*) and a seen part (*nimitta-bhāga*).[29, 30] The seeming reality of an inner self perceiving external events is nothing more than one aspect of consciousness perceiving itself in the form of images. A third part of consciousness, the *manas*, or thinking aspect, interprets the two parts as a self and an external world. This situation is also the basis for hatred, craving, fear, and other passions. In fact, the apparently real external world of things is nothing but internal images perceived by consciousness and grasped as a source of attachment by thought.[31]

This description explains why Yogācāra is called "Consciousness Only" School, in that both the self and the external world are mere images of the *manas* (or *kliṣṭa-manas*, "afflictive

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[27] 假立 (*jiǎ lì*, *upacāra*, metaphor): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “假說” [Linguistic convention, or custom], by Charles Muller, last modified August 28, 2011, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?50.xml+id(%27b5047-8aaa%27).

[28] My translation, in reference to the Chinese commentary: 羅時憲 Luó Shí Xiàn, *《成唯識論》講記 Commentary on* Chen Wei Shi Luen, 174–78.

[29] *Darśana-bhāga*: "lit. 'seeing,' viz., 'vision,' 'insight,' or 'understanding.' In a purely physical sense, darśana refers most basically to visual perception that occurs through the ocular sense organ. However, Buddhism also accepts a full range of sensory and extrasensory perceptions, such as those associated with meditative development … that also involve 'vision,' in the sense of directly perceiving a reality hidden from ordinary sight. Darśana may thus refer to the seeing that occurs through any of the five types of 'eyes' … mentioned in Buddhist literature." Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. “Darśana.”

[30] *Nimitta-bhāga*: "相/瑞相. In Sanskrit and Pāli, 'mark' or 'sign,' in the sense of a distinguishing characteristic, or a meditative 'image.' … In Buddhist epistemology, nimitta refers to the generic appearance of an object, in distinction to its secondary characteristics, or ANUVYAÑJANA. … In the context of THERAVĀDA meditation practice (BHĀVANĀ), as set forth in such works as the VISUDDHIMAGGA, nimitta refers to an image that appears to the mind after developing a certain degree of mental concentration ( SAMĀDHI ). …" Buswell and Lopez, s.v. “Nimitta.”

[31] Vasubandhu, *Three Texts on Consciousness Only: Demonstration of Consciousness Only; The Thirty Verses on Consciousness Only; The Treatise in Twenty Verses on Consciousness Only*, trans. Francis Harold Cook and Xuanzang, BDK English Tripitaka 60–I, II, III (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1999), 3.

mentation"). Taken as real and becoming an attachment, they create all kinds of problems in the form of human passions. Liberation cannot be obtained without correcting this delusion of the reality of self and *dharma*.

This type of Yogācāra discourse is in stark contrast with Pauline theology, which asserts that the Inner Person of the Christian will eventually become the prevailing self, being renewed constantly, while the outer person decays (2 Corinthians 4:16). Although for Paul, this Inner Person is also not a permanent, unchanging entity, since it is "renewed day by day," it is, nevertheless, an indicator of the spiritual progression of the Christian, set against the backdrop of a perishing "outward person." Far from being empty, this Inner Person gains stature throughout the Christian pilgrimage, as it is "strengthened with might by His Spirit" (Ephesians 3:16).

From the above analysis, the Yogācāra doctrine of the delusional self, which perhaps should be more appropriately named "non-self," like other Nikāya or Indian Buddhist teachings, does not seem to offer much common ground with the Biblical concept of the Inner Person.

## Mahāyāna Buddhism

If Nikāya Buddhism and Yogācāra Buddhism are characterized by a philosophical, atheistic propensity, their next-of-kin, Mahāyāna Buddhism, would be quite a departure from the family resemblance, although all are inseparably connected at their origin – Gautama Buddha, and at their ultimate objective - *Nibbāna* or *Nirvāna*. Concerning theism, some Mahāyāna schools might have revolutionized the "old-school" way of theorizing into some sort of theologizing, according to Wach's vivid portrayal:

> When we come to the supernaturalists of the Greater Vehicle each scripture outdoes the other. The Buddhas are infinitely multiplied in time and in space. There are hundreds of millions of them. There are countless Buddha-realms, each

> of them comprehending multimillions of worlds. Thus countless Buddhas are reigning in any given second. This is Mahāyāna.[32]

Wach goes so far as to speculate that the "central experience of Mahāyāna, as far as content is concerned," could be deemed as: "the discovery that there is (a) God." In this sense, Sakyamuni was just one of the innumerable manifestations of God in a particular space-time continuum, a fact commensurate with the oversized pantheon of Mahāyānism. Furthermore, "in back of all of [the manifestations] there stands the Dharmakaya, the true Being, which is concretized in the Tathāgata." The historical Gautama Buddha as a manifestation of this God was, in particular, a figure of available "help" for the sentient beings in the midst of suffering. Wach seems to consider such a concept of divine assistance as NOT a Chinese innovation that occurred during the importation and adaption of Buddhism in China, but an Indian originality:

> And now this thought [of extraneous help] was quickened with the religious ardor characteristic of the Indian people and was grasped with enormous intensity. This merciful help must be great, infinitely great, and near, infinitely near. There is no more living expression for the intensity with which this thought was thought than the godhead of Mahāyāna – incessantly multiplying, always clothing itself in new manifestations, always descending anew into the world of men, always prepared for new sacrifices. … We meet most of these great deities in the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* [*Sūtra on the White Lotus of the True Dharma*, or *Lotus Sūtra* for short]. At its center, however, is the Buddha Sakyamuni. In other Mahāyāna sutras it is more often Amitabha who appears as "God." … In the *Saddharma-Pundarika*, the Buddha Sakyamuni is called God. The sutra wishes to show him to us in his total splendor. Thus he is enthroned in immeasurable glory on the heavenly Gṛdhrakūṭa ….[33]

However staunch a supporter we find in Wach for this "Mahāyāna theism," the path must be trodden very carefully. Wach might have generalized Mahāyānism too much, too eagerly, since theism is against the grain of most established buddhologies. For instance, P. Williams emphatically avers: "Buddhists do not believe in the existence of God. There need be no debating about this. In practising Buddhism one never finds talk of God, there is no role for God,

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[32] Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 48.

[33] Wach, 49–50.

and it is not difficult to find in Buddhist texts attacks on the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, all-good Creator of the universe."[34] And the reason for this strong atheism is that the Buddhist enlightenment is primarily achieved through self-effort: "God is irrelevant to the Buddhist project of (broadly speaking) final freedom from all types of suffering through the attainment of nirvāna, liberation or enlightenment. Enlightenment is attained through oneself following a set path of morality, meditation and wisdom. It does not require any help from divine intervention or any reference to a God."[35]

Given such atheistic heritage in traditional Buddhism, theism nevertheless crept into Mahāyānism, notably when it was transmitted to China in the beginning of the first millennium. Through syncretism, certain schools acquired a doctrine of divine assistance as a way to further reduce the ascetic requirements for attaining the goal of liberation. Needless to say, this adaptation helped to popularize these schools. But it still does not mean that they had been wholeheartedly converted to theism as found in the Abrahamic religions. In this regard, Netland remarks that "there are some traditions within Mahayana Buddhism (such as Pure Land Buddhism) that do resemble theism in some respects. But it is not at all clear that these should be understood as embracing the reality of an eternal Creator. … Buddhists in south and east Asia traditionally have rejected the idea of an eternal Creator or God."[36]

If we restrict our discussion to the "theistic" subset of Mahāyāna Buddhism, then there exist certain interesting comparative intersections between the two religious traditions. It is

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[34] Paul Williams, *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism*, Reprint (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 25. Williams (1950–) is Emeritus Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy, head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, and co-director or Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Bristol in UK.

[35] Williams, 25.

[36] Harold Netland, "Jesus Is the Only Way to God," in *Debating Christian Theism*, ed. J. P. Moreland, Chad Meister, and Khaldown A. Sweis (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 500. Netland (1950–) is Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

worth pointing out again that our effort is not to directly equate the two sides, but to raise awareness of the similarities, even superficially, as viable possibilities for further research. To this end, we first note that the *Lotus Sūtra* gives a glorious portrayal of the Buddha as God to arouse the worshipful veneration of the followers. Due to this "piety [of] the experience of (a) God, [and] the idea of merciful help," a vivid disparity between the two major branches of Buddhism becomes apparent: atheistic Theravāda is propositionally autosoteriological, whereas "theistic Mahāyāna" is mystically heterosoteriological. For the latter, attaining personal *nirvāna*, which is the highest goal for Theravādans, would no longer be sufficient by itself alone. Instead, what comes into view is the liberation of all suffering sentient beings. In other words, the Mahāyāna ideal would be the "imitation of the Buddha," who is professed as "a universal world savior." Although *nirvāna* is the loftiest destiny of the individual, "true to the idea of imitation, the goal of the 'conduct' prescribed by the Mahāyāna ethic can never be to attain this Nirvāna … as quickly as possible. In general, the Mahayanist questions the possibility of attaining Nirvāna within a single existence. Mahāyānacarya is Bodhisattvacarya."[37] Insofar as "the 'formal principle' that dominates the Mahāyāna ethic is the idea of imitation," the Buddhist spirituality is very much reminiscent of the Christian devotion of the imitation of Christ, with both the Buddha and Jesus Christ being esteemed as God and Savior (albeit in different soteriological senses).[38]

Although the perception of this salvific Lord is different in many respects for theistic Mahāyānists and for Christians, there exists still another astonishing resemblance, viz. omniscience. The Christian triune God has always been ascribed such an attribute ever since the very incipiency of Christianity (or Judaism, to be precise). But in Mahāyāna Buddhism,

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[37] "Caryā 志行, basic meaning: determination and conduct" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “志行” [Determination and conduct], by Michel Mohr, last modified February 18, 2013, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?5f.xml+id(%27b5fd7-884c%27).

[38] Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 53–54.

Sakyamuni Buddha is likewise recognized with such supernatural capacity, as described by Wach: "In the Hīnayānist teaching, as we know, the content of the Buddha's knowledge is the Fourfold Truth and the Eightfold Path; there is nothing 'supernatural' about it. To the Mahāyāna Buddhist, this knowledge is somewhat different. It is an all-embracing and all-penetrating omniscience which is higher than all reason."[39]

Overall, we may conclude that the view of the self in Nikāya Buddhism, Indian Yogācāra, and some atheistic Mahāyāna schools are incompatible with the concept of Inner Person in Christianity. As for the rest of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which embraces a type of theism and is particularly widespread in East Asia, the similarity with Christianity does not end with the notion of a Savior God. Recall that the Tathāgata is a concrete embodiment of "the Dharmakaya, the true Being," and we are told that there are not just one such figure as the historical Gautama Buddha, but countless Buddhas and Tathāgatas before and after Him. In fact, all sentient beings possess the potential of becoming Tathāgatas. It is aptly summed up by Wach:

> … what [theistic] Mahāyāna shows to us is the highest reconciliation between God and man – this compassionate love turns to each man with the appropriate means and in unique ways in order to show him that he too has within himself the potential not only of ending his own suffering but also of one day being himself transformed from one saved to a savior, a Tathāgata. This thought binds together two diametrically opposed ideas – that of the majesty and glory of God, and that of the "deification" of men. In the [theistic] Mahāyāna of the *Saddharma-Pundarika* the two are reconciled.[40]

This amazing similitude between East Asian theistic Mahāyānism and Christianity, in regards to the conception of the inner potential or person, thus establishes the foundation of the comparative study in this chapter. To reiterate our theme, since the Christian New Testament

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[39] Wach, 54.

[40] Wach, 52–53.

does not give us many clues about the Inner Person, we resort to comparative study of the *Tathāgatagarbha* in Buddhism to enlighten us about the Inner Person.

## *Christianity in Similitude with East Asian Buddhism*

Since East Asian Buddhism is so different from her original Indian source in regards to the self, and since, as Park hints at, Buddhism acquired a "soul" on the way to China, the use of this relatively newer branch of Buddhism, especially the theistic variant, as a comparative vehicle for our study might run the risk of being considered inappropriate, because the texts we draw the Buddhist doctrines from might be considered inauthentic or even adulterated. Even though we strongly emphasize that there would be no attempt to decisively equate Buddhism with Christianity, a defense for using the theistic Mahāyāna as valid comparative vehicle is still in order. As such, some arguments in favor of using the Mahāyāna scriptures for comparison would be the following:

- If we consider East Asian Buddhism and its scriptures to be an interpolated version of the original Sanskrit or Pali Buddhism in India, should we not dismiss this branch as a heretic? Why should it be recognized as a major branch of Buddhism?
- If we expand the horizon further, does it mean that a new religion, established based on a previously existing one, should always be considered inferior or inauthentic? A case in point would be Judaism that branched out into Christianity, which in turn motivated the birth of Islam. Can anyone dismiss the latter two ramifications as a degenerate form of their oldest parent?
- In Christian theology, there is a "progressive revelation" proposition, which in the Reformed school states that "the progressive character of divine revelation is recognized in relation to

all the great doctrines of the Bible. … What at first is only obscurely intimated is gradually unfolded in subsequent parts of the sacred volume, until the truth is revealed in its fulness."[41] But, according to H. R. Niebuhr, a neo-orthodox theologian, the source of "progressiveness" is not just restricted to the Scripture: "A revelation which furnishes the practical reason with a starting point for the interpretation of past, present and future history is subject to progressive validation."[42] He then explains further:

> Nevertheless revelation is a moving thing in so far as its meaning is realized only by being brought to bear upon the interpretation and reconstruction of ever new human situations in an enduring movement, a single drama of divine and human action. So the God who revealed himself continues to reveal himself---the one God of all times and places. … In another slightly different sense we may speak of revelation as progressive. … In our conceptual knowledge we move back and forth from reason to experience and from experience back to reason. And in that dialectic of the mind our concepts are enriched, clarified and corrected no less than our experience is illuminated and directed. We do not easily change first principles but we discover more fully what they mean. … In that process the meaning of the revelation, its richness and power, grow progressively clearer. This progressive understanding of revelation is also an infinite process. … Revelation is not only progressive but it requires of those to whom it has come that they begin the never-ending pilgrim's progress of the reasoning Christian heart.[43]

Accordingly, later divine enlightenment to revelations could be so significant and subversive that they spontaneously and inevitably give birth to new sects, branches, or even entire religions. Again, the emergence of Christianity from Judaism is an instance of such revelation. And we also cannot deny the possibility that mysteries in the Christian Scripture may be further revealed or verified in other traditions. Then, it cannot be denied that East Asian theistic Mahāyānism also went through an evolution of progressive revelation, and that it is capable of enriching Christian knowledge about Biblical mysteries.

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[41] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 446.

[42] Helmut Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, Library of theological ethics ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 70. Niebuhr (1894–1962) was President of Elmhurst College and taught theology and Christian ethics at Yale Divinity School.

[43] Niebuhr, 71–72.

- There is a Buddhist paradigm that distinguishes between *nitārtha* (definitive teaching 了義教 *liǎo yì jāo*) and *neyārtha* (inexplicit teaching 不了義 *bù liǎo yì*).[44, 45] Blum claims that it is used in sectarian rivalry or in case of doctrinal disagreement, somewhat like the progressive revelation assertion above.

  > This distinction is used variously within the canon and in the commentarial traditions of each Buddhist culture as a hermeneutic to establish authority among conflicting doctrines, scriptures, and interpretations, expressing the notion that the *neyārtha* teachings are not fully expressed or revealed and are therefore preliminary, incomplete, or require additional explanation.[46]

- In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, the Buddha illustrates how He expounded the doctrine of the self circumstantially, and the MPNS is the (exclusive?) key to seeing the Buddha Nature:

  > 眾生佛性亦復如是, 常為一切煩惱所覆不可得見, 是故我說眾生無我, 若得聞是大般涅槃微妙經典,則見佛性. (T12n0374_p0411c03-05).
  >
  > (Translation) It is the same with the Buddha Nature within sentient beings. It is constantly covered by all the *kleśas* that obscure its visibility. This is the reason that I have said that sentient beings do not possess *ātmán*. However, if they get to hear this subtle *Sūtra of Mahāparinirvāṇa*, they may see the Buddha Nature.
  >
  > 諸佛菩薩有二種說：一者有性，二者無性。為眾生故說有法性，為諸賢聖說無法性。(T12n0374_p0521b05-06).
  >
  > (Translation) Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have two kinds of discourses: one is that there exists essence; the other is that there exists no essence. For the sake of (unenlightened) sentient beings, they say the essence of dharmas exists; for the sake of saints, they say that the essence of dharmas exists not.

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[44] 了義教 (*liǎo yì jāo*, *nitārtha*, definitive teaching)"Senses: An explicit, clear teaching, which does not require further interpretation to be properly apprehended. In the doctrinal classification system of the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* this refers to the third period of the Buddha's teaching. See 了義 and 三時教 (Skt. *nītârtha*)" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "了義教" [Definitive teaching], by Charles Muller, last modified May 3, 2012, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e86-7fa9-6559%27).

[45] 不了義 (*bù liǎo yì*, *neyārtha*, inexplicit teaching )"Senses: Implicit meaning; meaning not fully disclosed; a teaching that requires further explanation, usually a translation of Skt. *neyârtha*." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "不了義" [Inexplicit teaching], by Stephen Hodge and Charles Muller, last modified August 16, 2020, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?4e.xml+id(%27b4e0d-4e86-7fa9%27).

[46] Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra*, 1:35–354.

The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra essentially states that truth is revealed to each person according to the receiver's capacity or condition. Further extending this concept, we may venture to say that East Asian Buddhism, due to its entirely different historical, cultural and geographical milieu, sees the truth differently in many aspects than original Indian Buddhism, but neither is more correct or more authentic in representing the teachings of Gautama Buddha.

J. Wach speaks of a "prejudice which still frequently obstructs our appreciation of Mahāyāna Buddhism" as the supposition that Mahāyānism is "completely unoriginal and dependent; it is a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism – possibly an unfortunate mixture, to be understood and interpreted only as a degeneration of the original teaching of the Buddha."[47] Rather, Wach defends for Mahāyāna as a viable branch of Buddhism:

> … Mahāyāna Buddhism is nonetheless a unique phenomenon, which we cannot "explain" by summarizing its constituent elements. For no matter how many concepts, images, and phrases were borrowed and adopted from other religions, and no matter how superficial their reception has often been, there is a new center here. … we will never circumvent the necessity of confessing that in Mahāyāna, as opposed to the "old" form, something specifically new came into being out of a basic outlook that was new – something that had its own structure and its own value.[48]

Based on the above arguments, there should be justifiable ground for us to proceed with a comparative study between the Inner Person of Christianity and the *Tathāgatagarbha* of East Asian theistic Buddhism, especially as manifested in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.

## The Divine

As we have seen in the Buddhism chapter, contra Indian Yogācāra that proposes the *ālaya-vijñāna* as an ever-lasting but insubstantial consciousness, which connects one's past,

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[47] Wach, *Essays in the History of Religions*, 36.

[48] Wach, 37.

present, and future lifetimes in *saṃsāra*, Chinese Buddhism embraces the Daoist notion, 神 *shén*, to be an imperishable entity responsible for the transmission of karma in *saṃsāra*. The most common usage of the word *神 shén* is "deity" in general. As mentioned in our Buddhism chapter, the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* 寶藏論 (*Treatise of the Treasure*) considers this divine entity to be a manifestation of the Truth. To quote again:

> 夫真也者，無洲無渚，無伴無侶，無涯無際，無處無所，能為萬物之祖宗。…能為三界之根門。… 有用曰神，有形曰身，無為曰道，無相曰真。應物而號，隨物而造，常住常存，不生不老。(T45n1857_p0143c15-21).
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> (Translation) The Truth is without continents, companions, borders, or abodes; [thus] it can be the progenitor of all things … it can be the entry way of faculties ( 根門 *gēn mén*, *indriya*) of the threefold universe (三界 *sān jiè*, *trailokya* or *traidhātuka*). … Having functions/operations, it is call *shén*; having shapes, it is called body; being passive (無為 *wú wéi*, *asaṃskṛta* – unconditioned), it is called *dào*; having no characteristics, it is called truth. According to circumstances, it is entitled; according to objects, it creates; it abides forever, is unborn, and does not age.

But what is the Truth? From the following discourses of the Buddha about the *Tathāgatagarbha* and Buddha Nature in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, Truth nature is put in parallel with the secret *Tathāgatagarbha*:

> 若言有者,智不應染;若言無者,即是妄語。若言有者,不應默然,亦復不應戲論諍訟,但求了知諸法真性,凡夫之人戲論諍訟,不解如來微密藏故。(T12n0374_p0410c06-09).
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> (Translation) Those who assert that [Buddha Nature] does exist have a wisdom that is untainted. Those who assert that it does not exist are just speaking falsely. Those who assert that it does exist need not remain quiet, but they should not engage in frivolous speculation nor turn it into a matter of dispute. Just search for an understanding of the dharmas' Truth nature! Ordinary people who speculate or argue do so because they do not comprehend the subtle, hidden treasury that is the *Tathāgatagarbha*.
>
> 我諸弟子亦復如是,不知親近善知識故,修學無我,亦復不知無我之處,尚自不知無我真性,況復能知有我真性？善男子！如來如是說諸眾生皆有佛性.(T12n0374_p0408b04-08).

> (Translation) My disciples are also like that; due to ignorance about drawing near a teacher with good knowledge, they cultivate and learn about nonself.[49] But again, they do not know the place of nonself, nor the truth nature of nonself; how could they know about the truth nature of the existence of self? Oh, good man, the Tathāgata thus speaks of the existence of the Buddha Nature in all sentient beings.

Elsewhere, there is also the phrase *如來真性 rú lái zhēn xìng*, or the *truth nature of the Tathāgata*, found in《佛說大般泥洹經 *Discourse of the Buddha on Mahāparinirvāṇa*》(T12n0376_p0881c07), which directly combines Tathāgata with Truth nature, making them synonymous. Thus, it is safe to say that the God mentioned in the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* passage is a direct equivalent to *Tathāgatagarbha*.

Comparatively, in many respects, the divinity spoken in the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* is similar to the YHWH of the Christian Old Testament or even Jesus Christ of the New Testament. First, it is called "the Truth"; and that is precisely the same appellation that the earthly Jesus called Himself: "… I am the way (ἡ ὁδός), the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια), and the life (ἡ ζωή) …" (John 14:6). Within this self-declaration, something other than "the truth" is remarkable as well. The Chinese translation of "the way" is also 道 (*dào*) or 道路 (*dào lù*), indicating that Jesus is a practical solution to the human predicament, like a path leading to the final destination – the heavenly Father – not only in the afterlife, but in the here and now. As relating to *dào*, arguably the most mystically ontological title of Jesus in the New Testament could be none other than the apostle John's attribution in the beginning of his Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word (λόγος 道 *dào*), and the Word (λόγος) was with God, and the Word (λόγος) was God. The same was in the beginning

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[49] 善知識 (*shàn zhī shì*, teacher with good knowledge): "Basic Meaning: good and virtuous friend. Senses: A good friend or teacher who knows one well, and is able to advise properly concerning spiritual matters. A reliable teacher; someone whose mastery of Buddhism is sufficient to allow him/her to serve as a reliable teacher. In Pure Land Buddhism it is especially applied to the chief abbot; in Chan/Zen Buddhism it usually means one's own master. … (Skt. *kalyāṇa*, *kalyāṇa-mitra*, …)" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "善知識" [Good and virtuous friend], by Charles Muller, last modified May 7, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?55.xml+id(%27b5584-77e5-8b58%27).

with God" (John 1:1-2). The translation of the Greek, λόγος, as 道 *dào* is nothing short of a stroke of genius on the part of the translating committee of the Chinese Union Version, as this choice is, on the one hand, compatible with the Chinese philosophical vocabulary, and on the other, teeming with multivalent meanings – word, way, principle, doctrine, saying, etc.

The three manifestations of the Truth in the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* passage – *shén*, body, and *dào* – thus wonderfully comport with Jesus as being God, the Incarnate, and Λόγος, respectively, provided acknowledgement is made about their intrinsic improbability to be actually and fully equivalent. Also, just as the Truth creates, the Λόγος likewise acts as the Creator: "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). Just as the Truth "abides forever, is unborn, and does not age," so are all three Persons of the Christian triune God eternal and imperishable: "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God …" (1 Timothy 1:17); the latter are also transcending time: "… one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8); and there exists an eternal life equally shared with the Son, Jesus Christ: "… God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11), with immutability to boot: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). Thus, this *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* passage contains so many resemblances with Christianity that it appears, *prima facie*, to take on an impression, though vaguely, of a concise Chinese version of the description of the Christian triune God. It possibly even stirs one's imagination as to whether YHWH Himself bestowed a special revelation to the author of the *śāstra*, however remote the probability is.

How are all the above correlations between the God of Mahāyāna and the God of Christianity related to the Inner Person? The apostle John tells us: "… God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11). Since the eternal life in Christian believers

is actually that in Jesus Christ, that life of the Inner Person, first and foremost, is divine because it belongs to the Second Person of the triune Godhead. But, some, even Christians, might be taught to think that the idea of a mere mortal's being deified is unholy, at best, or even sacrilegious. However, Jesus had said, "… Is it not written in your law, 'I said, ye are gods?'" (John 10:34). He was just paraphrasing the psalmist: "I have said, 'Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High'" (Psalms 82:6). Why would Jesus confirm this odd saying of the Jewish Scripture to call God's children, "gods," knowing fully well that humans are laden with sins (cf. Matthew 26:28 "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.")? Certainly Jesus does not refer to the Pauline "outward person" as "god," since it is under the law of sin (cf. Romans 7:23). What He is referring to as "gods," therefore, logically points to the Inner Person, because it would appear that only the Inner Person can be so undefiled and pure as to be called "god." It may well be said that not just Christians, but all humans possess the Inner Person that is holy, because in a wider sense, all of mankind are children of God, having inherited the divine breath bestowed on Adam.

Even more blasphemous-sounding is this rarely preached prophetical verse: "Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, 'Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands *command ye Me*'" (Isaiah 45:11, emphasis added). Now, who dares, and actually is able, to command the sovereign Almighty God about His work? If one does not even know about God's work, how does one know what to "command Him" about, not to mention having the boldness to do so? In this vein, who but the divine life of the Inner Person inside the saints may know the work of God's hands well enough to have the audacity to "command Him"? This passage appears to be an indication of the divinity of the

Inner Person, that it can know the mind of God and "command Him" regarding His work, effectively resulting in a seamless divine-human cooperation.

In the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* 寶藏論 passage just quoted, the Truth is personified to be God and *Dào*, and can be embodied. We have compared this Truth to the second Person of the Christian God, Jesus Christ. And since the eternal life bestowed on the saints is actually the life of the Christ, this comparison we may expand to that between the Truth and the Pauline Inner Person. Furthermore, regarding the divine nature of the Buddha Himself, there is an astonishing record of Siddhārtha Gautama making the well-known self-proclamation immediately upon birth, as found in the《佛本行集經》(*Abhiniṣkramaṇa Sūtra*, *Sūtra of the Great Renunciation*):

> 童子初生,無人扶持,住立於地,各行七步,凡所履處,皆生蓮花。顧視四方,目不曾瞬,不畏不驚,住於東面,不似孩童呱然啼叫,言音周正,巧妙辭章,而說是言：「一切世間,唯我獨尊,唯我最勝,我今當斷生老死根。(T03n0190_p0699a10-15).
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> (Translation) When the child was born, without the support from others, he stood erect, and took seven strides (in all directions). Wherever he treaded, lotus flowers bloomed. He scanned the four directions without ever blinking once; without fear or startle he fixated on the east side; unlike infants that cry in shrieking voices, his linguistic skill was impeccable, and his vocabulary and composition, proficient and wonderful. In such manner he spoke: "In all the cosmos, only I am supreme. Only I am the most excellent. Today, I shall cut off the root of birth, aging, and death.

The *Nirvāna Sūtra* has a slightly different variation of this miraculous birth of Sakyamuni:

> 或閻浮提示入母胎，令其父母，生我子想，而我此身，畢竟不從婬欲和合而得生也。我已久從無量劫來離於婬欲，我今此身，即是法身，隨順世間，示現入胎。善男子！此閻浮提林微尼園，示現從母摩耶而生，生已即能東行七步，唱如是言：『我於人、天、阿修羅中，最尊最上。』(T12n0374_p0388b24-c01).
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> (Translation) Besides, I was shown to have enter my mother's womb in Jambudvīpa, making the parents think that they have conceived me as a son; and yet, this body of mine is ultimately not born from the intercourse of sexual craving. Since countless *kalpas*, I have long departed from sexual craving. This current body of mine is indeed a *dharmakāya*, conforming to the world, and

> manifesting as entering the womb. Oh, good man, in the Lumbinī garden of Jambudvīpa, it displayed my birth from Māyā, my mother, at which time of birth, I was capable of making seven strides towards the east, and sang such words: "I am the supreme and the highest among men, heaven, and devas (*asuras*)."

The spiritual origin of the corporeal Buddha is reminiscent of the earthly Jesus, since the latter was born not through human conjugation, but through the impregnation of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35), providing the physical body of Jesus a divine origin instead of "the intercourse of sexual craving" as is said of the Buddha. In Jesus' case, His holy nature is so much emphasized that it sometimes even extends to His mother, Mary of Nazareth, in what is termed, the "immaculate conception" doctrine, which was officially admitted to Roman Catholicism in the Council of Basle in 1439.[50] However, the infant Jesus did not have the wondrous powers of the newborn Sakyamuni, nor any self-declaration of supremacy, which when filtered through the worldly lens, is nothing short of arrogant, egotistical boasting on the part of Gautama Buddha. Nevertheless, upon careful consideration, this type of declaration is simply the exaltation of the Buddha's inner divine nature, much like Jesus' confirmation of the truth revealed by the psalmist, which pronounces: "You are gods!" Therefore, there is a good connection here that the Mahāyāna notion of "divinity" in the Buddha and thus in Buddha Nature, however different from that of Christianity, serves as a mirror to reflect the divine nature of the Inner Person. Since Christianity is a monotheistic religion, this divine Inner Person does not derive the divinity intrinsically. Rather, it should be a "participation" in the holiness of the triune God, when YHWH breathed His "breath of life" into Adam (Genesis 2:7).

An indication of this divine inner life is when Jesus asked the disciples about His true identity: "He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed

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[50] Maurice Jourjon and Bernard Meunier, "Mary," in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste, vol. 1, *A-F* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1003.

art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:15-17). This incident happened before the advent of the Holy Spirit and before Jesus' death and resurrection, signifying that the Holy Spirit had not come to dwell inside the disciples yet. One cannot help but marvel: how did Peter receive such a great revelation, if his Inner Person were not already a "sacred spirit" in itself, capable of receiving a direct revelation from the eternal Father Himself? This was confirmed by Jesus' contrasts between "flesh and blood" and "My Father," the former relating to the fallen human nature and the latter to the holy Divinity. This communication between God and the Inner Person becomes even more pronounced after the indwelling of the Holy Spirit from the Pentecost on, as unmistakably stated by the apostle Paul: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Regarding the breath of God, to illustrate the relationship between the Holy Spirit and God the Father, that the former is an expiration of the latter, Vetö opines that "the Father's action of breathing out makes the Breath exist. The Breath is always related to him and its *locus* is the depths of the Father." Although this Breath is the "life and existence as such" of the Father, He "is the source of the divinity and is not Himself produced, because He is ingenerate. However, one of the dimensions of His divine existence and life is to breathe a breath. It is an aspect of the Father's act of subsistence … the inner life-giving breathing of the Father manifests itself *ad extra* as mobile, lively, and vibrant." If so, we can also apply the same principle to Adam's creation, since "Cyril of Alexandria also describes the Holy Spirit as the breath that proceeds from a person's mouth. For this reason, the 'breath of life' given to Adam in the second narrative

of creation is a participation in God's life."[51] Because the breath transformed Adam from "the dust of the ground" into "a living soul (חַיָּה לְנֶפֶשׁ)," his soul or spirit must necessarily "participate" in God's life and spirit (πνεῦμα ὁ θεὸς "God [is] Spirit," cf. John 4:24). This participation would render the spirit or Inner Person of Adam divine, which by implication, is also applicable to the Inner Person of his descendents, namely, all human beings, assuming this part of humanity is unpolluted by the fall.

## The Eternal

Closely related to the property of divinity is eternity, which is also encompassed by the same verse quoted earlier in the *Bǎo Zàng Lùn*: "The Truth … abides forever, is unborn, and does not age." The *Anūnatvā-Apūrṇatva-Nirdeśa* (*Neither Increase nor Decrease Sūtra*)《佛說不增不減經》likewise states: "舍利弗！如來法身恒,以常可歸依故、以未來際平等故。(Trans.) Oh Śāriputra, the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgata is eternal, and because it is permanent, it can be a refuge; because it is equitable in the future realms" (T16n0668_p0467b02-03). The *Nirvāna Sūtra* also abounds with statements about the eternity of the Buddha Nature, or of the Tathāgata, such as "如來身者，是常住身、不可壞身、金剛之身、非雜食身，即是法身。(Trans.) The Tathāgata body is an eternally abiding body, an imperishable body, an adamantine body, and not a foodstuff-ingesting body; it is indeed a *dharmakāya*" (T12n0374_p0382c27-29). Thus the evidence of Tathāgata's eternity is plentiful in the *sūtras*.

As for the eternity of God, scriptural references are everywhere in both Testaments. The Bible might also somehow implicitly insinuate the same attribute about the Inner Person. Wrote

[51] Étienne Vetö, *The Breath of God: An Essay on the Holy Spirit in the Trinity*, ed. Ephraim Radner (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019), 44–45. Italics original. Vetö (1964–) is Professor of Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy.

the apostle Paul, "According as He hath chosen us in Him *before the foundation of the world* (πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμοῦ εἶναι, lit. "before foundation of [the] cosmos to exist"), that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Ephesians 1:4). Also, the same apostle states, "[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus *before the world began* (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων, lit. 'before time eternal')" (2 Timothy 1:9, italics added). These are some paradoxical and baffling statements of the apostle. If we had not existed before the creation of the universe, how did YHWH elect and give grace to us? But the first human being was created *after* the creation of the cosmos. In fact, he was the last of God's creation before He felt very satisfied and rested (cf. Genesis 1:27 – 2:2). How had God chosen us before even creating us?

To answer this question satisfactorily, some references to commentaries are in order. In the Ephesian verse, a pivotal phrase is "in Him (Christ)" or "ἐν αὐτῷ." The Greek preposition, *ἐν*, is a very versatile word, which Bock comments that "some debate whether 'in Christ' points to the sphere into which we are elected (in Christ) or the means by which we get there (by means of Christ). In one sense, both are implied, but here God is praised for the benefits we receive … so sphere is probably better in the light of the book as a whole since our position in Christ is the point of the letter."[52] If "sphere" is the correct reading, then the implication is enormous. The eighteenth century Bible expositor, John Gill, asserts that "by being chosen [believers] come to be in [Christ]; for this refers not to their openly being in him at conversion, as believers, but to their *secretly being in him before time*. Christ, as Mediator, is the object of election himself; and

[52] Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel and Nicholas Perrin, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 34. Bock (1953–) is executive director of cultural engagement and senior research professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

all the elect were chosen in him as their head, in whose hands their persons, grace, and glory are, and so are safe and secure in him."[53] Being "secretly" in Christ is somewhat redolent of the "secret treasure store" of the *Tathāgatagarbha*, although, of course, they have their respective, distinct salvific significances.

This "being in Christ before the foundation of the world" is described as "prototype" by the German theologian, Willibald Beyschlag (1823-1900), who postulates: "that the divinely conceived prototypes of perfected believers are from eternity posited by God in the One Prototype of humanity acceptable unto Him, as the countless multiplications of the same, to be thereupon brought through the historically realized One Prototype to their realization and perfection."[54] In this case, Christ Himself is the First Prototype of God for the entire humanity, which is a proposition supported by the Bible – even Jesus acknowledges His brotherhood with the believers (Mark 3:34-35; cf. Hebrews 2:11, Romans 8:29). And, since God made mankind in His image and after His likeness, the "prototype" metaphor does make sense.

Darby's comment on this Ephesian verse elevates the "Christian system" above the world and history: "Now this expression is not simply that of the sovereignty of God. … but this shows that we belong in the counsels of God to a system set up by Him in Christ before the world existed, which is not of the world when it does exist, and exists after the fashion of this world has passed away. This is a very important aspect of the Christian system." And because Christians belong to a system transcending the world and time, "our place was given us in Christ before the

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[53] John Gill, "John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible," Internet Sacred Text Archive, 63 1746, s.v. "Ephesians Chapter 1," https://www.sacred-texts.com/bib/cmt/gill/index.htm. Emphasis added. Gill (1697–1771), "was an English Baptist writer and theologian. Gill was a strong Calvinist. This work is considered his magnum opus, a commentary on the entire Bible."

[54] Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*, rev. and ed. William P. Dickson, trans. Maurice J. Evans, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1880), 37, footnote 1. Quoted from *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments: ein biblisch-theologischer Versuch* by Willibald Beyschlag, 1866, p. 141. Meyer (1800–1873) was a Protestant divine and best known for his 16-vol. New Testament commentary, *Kritischexegetischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*.

world existed."[55] This "transcendence" applied to the Christians is partly echoed in Eadie, when he says,

> The phrase itself declares that this election is no act of time, for time dates from the creation. Prior to the commencement of time were we chosen in Christ. The generic idea, therefore, is what Olshausen calls *Zeitlosigkeit*, Timelessness, implying of course absolute eternity. The choice is eternal, and it realises itself or takes effect in that actual separation by which the elect, οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ, are brought out of the world into the church, and so become κλητοὶ, ἅγιοι, καὶ πιστοὶ.[56]

In the same vain, Gundry elaborates on the "sphere" aspect: "Paul traces our Spiritual blessings back to God's having selected us out of the mass of humanity, and having done so 'before the founding of the world,' so that the selection didn't depend on anything meritorious which we'd done … 'In him' indicates that even our location in Christ was planned by God before his 'founding of the world.'"[57] If God had reserved "our location in Christ," then could it be argued that such act has surpassed mere foreknowledge into the territory of foreordination?

Such foreordination is implied by Klein as he describes the God's election of the Church: "In keeping with the dominant theme of unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church, Paul sees the entire body of Christ as the object of God's pretemporal election."[58] Elsewhere, Klein elaborates this corporate notion further, "Paul specifies the timing of this choice of the church – it was pretemporal, before the world was created. God made the choice 'in him' (that is, 'in Christ'). … Christ is the principal elected one, and the corporate body included in him consists of the ones

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[55] John Nelson Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, vol. 4, *Acts-Philippians* (London: Stow Hill Bible and Tract, 1965), 288. Darby (1800–1882) was one of the original Plymouth Brethren and the founder of the Exclusive Brethren, deemed to be the father of modern Dispensationalism and Futurism.

[56] John Eadie, *Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed. (London: Griffin, Bohn, 1861), 22. Eadie (1810–1876) was a Scottish theologian and biblical critic.

[57] Robert Horton Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-By-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation*, vol. 2, *Romans-Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 758. Gundry (1932–) is professor emeritus of New Testament and Greek at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California.

[58] William W. Klein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., vol. 12, *Ephesians-Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 48. Klein (1946–) is professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary in Littleton, Colorado.

God has chosen."[59] But a cautionary note is also attached, that the apostle Paul does not advocate the preexistence of the human souls "in the heavens with Christ (a Platonic idea), nor that we as individuals were present physically in some mythological sense prior to creation (as in later Gnostic teaching)."[60] Accordingly, if there is any hint of the pretemporal Church, she is but a "conceptual notion" in the mysterious mind of God. To this effect Lincoln opines:

> Probably then the notion of the election of believers in Christ has been combined with that of the preexistence of Christ. This does not imply the preexistence of the Church, an idea which can be found later in early Christian writings (cf. 2 Clem 14.1; Herm. Vis. 1.1.6; 2.4.1). It is not the Church but the choice of the Church which precedes the foundation of the world. So if there is to be any talk of the preexistence of the Church, it can only be of "ideal" preexistence, i.e., in the mind or counsel of God.[61]

However, without explicitly stating the preexistence of the Church or even of the faithful, MacArthur seems to insinuate such status in saying "By God's sovereign election, those who are saved were placed in eternal union with Christ before creation even took place," and that God had "designed the church, the Body of His Son, before the world began."[62] Furthermore, he reasons that "Because in God's plan Christ was crucified for us 'before the foundation of the world' (1 Pet. 1:20), we were designated for salvation by that same plan at that same time. … We belonged to God before time began, and we will be His after time has long run its course."[63]

For modern theologians, the closest to asserting the preexistence of the Church in Christ would be the commentary of Ridderbos, as he deems God to have "the actual appropriation of

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[59] William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 154.

[60] Klein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12:48.

[61] Andrew T. Lincoln, *World Biblical Commentary*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger et al., vol. 42, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 24, ProQuest Ebook Central. Lincoln (1944–), a British New Testament scholar, is Emeritus Professor of New Testament at the University of Gloucestershire.

[62] John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 11, 13. MacArthur (1939–), an American Reformed Baptist pastor and author, is the chancellor emeritus of The Master's University and The Master's Seminary in Santa Clarita, California.

[63] MacArthur, 14.

the church to himself before the foundation of the world," which is made possible through the phrase *in Christ*. And it is a "corporate" preexistence:

> Paul speaks here, too, of the comprehension of the church in Christ. As it, although still on earth, has in Christ received a place in heaven (Eph. 2:6), and thus in Christ participates in the heavenly blessings (Eph. 1:3), so – Paul makes the connection here expressly – it [the Church] was already united with the pre-existent Christ and thus chosen by God in him. The inclusion of the church in Christ, *its corporate existence in him, Paul traces back to this pre-existence.* As its life is hid in God with the Exalted One (Col. 3:3), so its election is in him before the foundation of the world. Even there the church's being in Christ can be spoken of, and thus its election in him in whom God purposed his good pleasure, indeed, who himself can be called God's "Foreknown" before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20).[64]

Now, was it only the Church as a whole, but not the individual believer, that is the object of the pretemporal election? Klein notices that "many commentators prefer a 'both/and' answer to this question. They agree that God chose the church in Christ, but go on to argue that inherent in the choice of the group is the choice of specific individuals to populate that body."[65] These theologians are correct to maintain that, besides the corporate Church, the election of the individual believer was also ordained before the foundation of the world, because this choice is actually attested in another Biblical verse by the apostle John, as observed by MacArthur, that the elect had their names "written in the book of life from the foundation of the world …" (Revelation 17:8b, cf. 13:8).[66] Whether this "preexistence" of the individual believer in Christ was "secretly being in Christ before time" (Gill), "prototypes of perfected believers … in the One Prototype" (Beyschlag) in the counsel of the Godhead, members of a "Christian system" established by God in Christ before time (Darby), existing in *Zeitlosigkeit* (Olshausen), being granted a "location in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Gundry), an "ideal preexistence

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[64] Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 347. Ridderbos (1909–2007) was professor of New Testament at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in Kampen. Emphasis added.

[65] Klein, *The New Chosen People*, 153.

[66] MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 14.

in the mind or counsel of God" (Lincoln), or being "placed in eternal union with Christ before creation" (MacArthur), the fact that their names are already "written in the book of life from the foundation of the world" and that no human beings corporeally existed at that pre-historical juncture leads us to a possible explanation that, perhaps it was the Inner Person, or at least its blueprint, which existed in God that had been the object of His election?

The apostle Paul also wrote a similar verse to his disciple, Titus: "upon hope of life age-during (ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ζωῆς αἰωνίου, lit. "on expectation of life eternal"), which God, who doth not lie, did promise *before times of ages* (πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων, lit. "before times of eternities")" (Titus 1:2). Again, the question is: how did God promise eternal life before time, which by inference was the creation of the universe? Was it perchance an eternal life that He ordained for the Inner Person to inherit? Combined with the revelation received by the apostle John about the Book of Life, containing names of the faithful from before the foundation of the world, there are sufficient evidences in the New Testament to suggest some form of preexistence of the Inner Person, whether only in spiritual archetype or conceptual blueprint in the counsel of God. If this speculation is somewhat true, then it signifies that the Inner Person also has the divine attribution of past eternality. Even if not, it surely will encompass future eternity, since it is "renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Eternity certainly has different connotations in Buddhism as opposed to Christianity. For the *Tathāgatagarbha*, it is said to exist from the past eternity to the future eternity. For the Inner Person, if it did not preexist before time, at least it has the Biblical assurance to last forever, beyond this physical universe. Both traditions indicate that the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, respectively, are transcendent and beyond the common human cognition. Therefore,

certain efforts must be spent before a person can discover their existence and activate their proper functions.

## The Pure

If divine characteristics are ascribed to the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, then certainly purity must also be one of their fundamental attributes. Sure enough, purity is everywhere attested to about the *Tathāgatagarbha* in the *sūtras*. For example, the MPNS has this statement:

> 善男子！如來亦爾，於諸眾生猶如良醫，知諸煩惱體相差別而為除斷,開示如來祕密之藏,清淨佛性常住不變。(T12n0374_p0410c04-06).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, the Tathāgata also, is like a proficient physician to the sentient beings, who knows the different afflicted bodily characteristics and removes [the defilements] for them. He reveals to them the secret *Tathāgatagarbha* as pure, undefiled Buddha Nature that is permanent and immutable.

Another unmistakable record of the purity of the *Tathāgatagarbha* would be the famous anecdote in the *Platform Sūtra* of the sixth patriarch of Chán, Huèi Néng.[67] The story began with the fifth patriarch, 弘忍 Hóng Rěn, seeking a successor among his disciples. The principal disciple, 神秀 Shén Xiò, naturally thought that he would be the primary, if not only, choice. With arrogance too satiated to conceal, he proudly displayed his literary and doctrinal genius by writing a poem on the wall of the south hallway, in the middle of the night when no one was around:

> 身是菩提樹　心如明鏡臺,
> 時時勤拂拭　莫使有塵埃。(T48n2007_p0337c01-c02).

[67] Full name of the sūtra is 《南宗頓教最上大乘摩訶般若波羅蜜經六祖惠能大師於韶州大梵寺施法壇經一卷》Southern School's Subitist Doctrine, Supreme Mahayana Great Perfection of Wisdom: The Platform Sutra as Delivered by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng at the Dafan Temple in Shao Prefecture

(Translation) The body is a bodhi tree, and the heart is as a mirror-stand;
Be sure to diligently wipe it, lest any dust accumulates on it.

When the fifth patriarch saw the poem, not knowing who wrote it, he sighed reluctantly:

《金剛經》云：『凡所有相,皆是虛妄。』不如留此偈,令迷人誦。依此修行,不墮三惡;依法修行,人有大利益。」(T48n2007_p0337c06-08).

(Translation) It is written in the *Diamond Sūtra* that all phenomena with concrete forms are empty and vain. But still, let this poem remain here for the adoration of the confused. Those who cultivate themselves this way do not fall into the three evils. Those who cultivate themselves according to the Dharma should reap great benefits.

Hóng Rěn knew that the author of the poem was not an awakened Chán practitioner. However, he allowed the display to remain because it still serves the purpose of encouraging the unawakened pupils to do the right, moral things. Lo and behold, the majority of the pupils in the monastery highly appraised this poem for its elegant lucidity, and thus almost unanimously agreed that the author should be the next patriarch. At the time, the illiterate Huèi Néng was only a cook. When someone informed him that the master was seeking an heir to his mantle and alms bowl (symbols of legacy), and also told him about the poem, Huèi Néng asked a literate friend to write on the wall of the west hall two similar poems, in reply to Shén Xiò's work:

菩提本無樹，明鏡亦無臺，
佛性常清淨，何處有塵埃？(T48n2007_p0338a07-08).

(Translation) The Bodhi has no tree to begin with; neither does the mirror have a stand;
The Buddha Nature is permanently pure; where does it collect dusts?

心是菩提樹，身為明鏡臺，
明鏡本清淨，何處染塵埃？(T48n2007_p0338a10-11).

(Translation) The heart is the bodhi tree; the body is the mirror-stand.
The mirror is originally pure; where does it attract dusts?

Naturally, after reading this pair of poems, the fifth patriarch passed down his legacy to Huèi Néng covertly and then sent him away, in fear of arousing the anger of other disciples to

the harm of the future sixth patriarch. Later, Huèi Néng taught that all persons originally have the wisdom of *bodhi-prajñā* (提般若之智，世人本自有之, T48n2007_p0338b04-05) and that the Buddha Nature is the same whether in the foolish or in the wise; it is only differentiated between confusion and awakening – confused, it is foolish and awakened, it becomes wise (愚人智人，佛性本亦無差別，只緣迷悟，迷即為愚，悟即成智。T48n2007_p0338b-06). Because of his strong Chán instinct, the concept of heart-to-heart transmission without writing, and the belief in sudden awakening, Huèi Néng was later hailed as the founder of the southern subitist Chán school. The launch of his entire enterprise started as a refutation on self-effort to maintain the purity inside, because he already realized the intrinsic purity of the Buddha Nature within.

What, then, can we say about the purity of the Inner Person? First of all, obviously it was pure from the very beginning of its creation, because undeniably, the first breath God blew into Adam was the most uncontaminated "spiration." But, can we still maintain the purity of the Inner Person after the fall? If depravity crept into all of mankind, would it not defile the Inner Person, too? Or is it the case, like the *Tathāgatagarbha*, that the Inner Person's purity is also just "covered" by sins, not completely lost due to corruption? Pertaining to this aspect, the New Testament lists cleansing the human conscience as one of the major function of the blood of Jesus Christ, according to the author of the Epistle to Hebrews: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, *purge your conscience* from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14, emphasis added). How is conscience related to the Inner Person or spirit? Witness Lee considers the spirit to be "composed of three [parts]: conscience, fellowship, and intuition," calling the conscience "the most manifest

part … also the most important part of the spirit."[68, 69] If so, we can reason that once the sin-laden conscience is purged, the Inner Person is free to approach God and serve Him. This is why the apostle Paul could "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22), since his Inner Person had been redeemed and purged of sin by the blood of Jesus Christ. Further progress along this spiritual path would engender God's ἀγάπη (love of the rational kind): "Now the end of the commandment is charity (ἀγάπη, love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience (συνείδησις), and of faith unfeigned" (1 Timothy 1:5), and this purified status would eventually enable such a person to "[hold] the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Timothy 3:9). Once conscience is cleansed of the stains of sin, the Inner Person would be restored to its pristine, pure condition.

Closely related to the purging of the nature of sin, there is an intriguing concept in the Bible which uses the metaphor of clothing, as in "putting on or off," in a moral sense: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:12). Again, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). These exhortations of the apostle Paul treats the sinful nature as an old garment that can be taken off, and substituted with "the armour of light" and "the new man." The part about taking off the old corruption is an interesting contrast with the enlightenment process of removing the adventitious defilements from the *Tathāgatagarbha*,

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[68] Witness Lee, *The Parts of Man* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 1969), 5. Lee was a Chinese Christian preacher and leader of Local Church in Taiwan and the United States.

[69] Witness Lee, *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1959* (Anaheim, CA: Living Stream Ministry, 2018), 4:101.

except in Paul, there is an additional, positive aspect of "putting on" the new and bright. Furthermore, Christian virtues, including even love, can also be appended:

> "But now ye also *put off* all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have *put off* the old man with his deeds; And have *put on* the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: … *Put on* therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness" (Colossians 3:8-14, emphasis added).[70]

One of the curiosities in this focus on the metaphor of garment concerns incorruptibility: "For this corruptible must *put on* incorruption, and this mortal must *put on* immortality. So when this corruptible shall have *put on* incorruption, and this mortal shall have *put on* immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). Quite unusually, Paul does not mention that the human corruptible nature needs to be "wiped out," but rather, to be "covered up," perhaps because in his mind, incorruption, or in the New Testament parlance, the life of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is so much more powerful than sin and death as to be able to "swallow up" the depravity plaguing the human race since the sin of our First Ancestors.[71] However, elsewhere, Paul does talk about the death of the old body: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:6). "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24). In contrast, the New Testament teaching of "putting on" is just the conceptual opposite of the uncovering notion

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[70] Italics are added for emphasis. Underlined words are additions of the particular translation not found in the original Greek or Hebrew. The same notations apply throughout this chapter.

[71] J. J. Lias, *Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges: The First Eipstle to the Corinthians, with Notes, Map, Introduction and Appendices* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1892), 185. Lias was vicar of St. Edward, Cambridge. Lias notes that the origin of this passage, Isaiah 25:8, carries the meaning "He hath swallowed up death for ever. … The verb, in the perfect tense in the Hebrew, as speaking of the fixed purpose of God, and is here rendered by the aorist, and thus referred to the Death and Resurrection of Christ …"

in the *Tathāgatagarbha*, where the objective is to reveal what is hidden inside that is pure, undefiled, and sacred.

Not only morally does the New Testament teaches us to "put off" the corrupt/wicked and "put on" the incorrupt/virtuous, but even further, ontologically, it urges the Christian to "put on" Jesus Christ Himself, in essence to identify ourselves with Him. Paul wrote to the Roman believers, "But *put ye on* the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Romans 13:14). In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul even equates baptism with the wearing about of Jesus Christ: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ" (Galatians 3:27). It is not surprising that Paul inherited this metaphor of garment from the Hebrew Bible: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 42:1). If the "servant" pertains to Jesus Christ, as Christians believe, then even Christ Himself had been "put on" God's Spirit for His special ministry to mankind. Paul also calls this kind of special identification with God, "the marks of the Lord Jesus (τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ)" (Galatians 6:17), or literally, "the branded marks of Jesus," denoting "mark[s] incised or punched (for recognition of ownership)."[72] Such special honor was bestowed on the veteran minister of Christ since he had been through all kinds of persecutions, while "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" (2 Corinthians 4:10a) for the sake of His Church.

That what one wears, figuratively, has special eschatological significance is demonstrated by a parable of Jesus about a king's wedding feast:

> And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer

[72] Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "G4742 στίγμα."

> darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:11-14).

And similarly, the apostle John, in his apocalyptic vision, sees the worthy overcomers wearing white garments before the Holy One of Israel: "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Revelation 3:4-5).

These Biblical passages indicate that, other than confession and baptism into Jesus Christ, for the purging of sin, it is equally important to "take off" the old, corrupt self and to "wear" Him about oneself. These are, respectively, the passive and active aspects of a holistic salvation that God prepares for His chosen people.

To conclude, both the *Tathāgatagarbha* in Buddhism and the Inner Person in Christianity are originally pure. The reason they do not function as they should is that they are either covered by adventitious defilements (in the former case) or contaminated by sin (in the latter case). To remove these obstructions and restore their innate purity, the *Tathāgatagarbha* requires the awakening and cultivation process, while the Inner Person needs the cleansing of the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, the "putting off" of the old self, plus the "putting on" of the Savior as its ultimate redemption and salvation.

## The True Self

In the "True Self" subsection of chapter two, we conclude that many theologians suggest the interchangeability of the New Testament Inner Person and a person's true self, by giving it various names such as: "the self of the heart," "inner self," "true personality," "real self,"

"*nous*/mind," "*pneuma*/spirit," or "the willing 'I,' the 'I' as mind." The reason for this plethora of innovative appellations is that the Christian Bible, in both Testaments, actually never mentions a "true self." Even so, it is quite possible that the idea of "true self" does exist, especially in reference to the term ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος. This situation is very much like the well-established orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the exact term of which is also wanting in the Bible. In regards to the self, what does East Asian Buddhism teach us? The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* directly equates the self to the *Tathāgatagarbha*:

> 佛言：「善男子！我者即是如來藏義。一切眾生悉有佛性,即是我義。如是我義,從本已來,常為無量煩惱所覆，是故眾生不能得見。(T12n0374_p0407b09-11).
>
> (Translation) The Buddha said, "Oh, good man, what is called self is precisely the meaning of *Tathāgatagarbha*. The fact that all sentient beings have the Buddha Nature means self (exists). This self, ever since the very beginning, is constantly covered by innumerable quantities of *kleśa*; therefore sentient beings are unable to see it.

With an even more straight-forward manner, the Buddha taught Bodhisattva Kāshyapa:

> 善男子！今日如來所說真我，名曰佛性。(T12n0374_p0412c25-26).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, the true self that the Tathāgata relates to today is named Buddha Nature.

In these terse passages, the Buddha directly and unequivocally equates the self, the *Tathāgatagarbha*, and Buddha Nature. He also points out that this nature is inherent in all sentient beings, that it has existed from the very beginning, but that it is ordinarily concealed by defilements. With this view in mind, if we examine the Inner Person in Christianity as true self, the Bible teaches that all humans possess it, not just Christians. For Christianity, of course the human beginning would be the creation of Adam. When YHWH breathed out the breath of life into Adam, He imparted life and spirit to the first man. Since then, all posterity of Adam possess this Inner Person. But is it possible to expand the scope to all creatures as in Buddhism? It would

seem that other creatures are rarely related in the Christian Scripture. But, it is only because the Bible's primary concern is human beings that seldom the creatures are mentioned. Nevertheless, some traces could still be found, the most significant of which being in the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus gave the eleven disciples the so-called "great commission" (v.15): "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει)." Most commentators consider "creature" to simply mean mankind, in effect denying the literal meaning of Jesus' command. But Bengel begs to differ: "to men primarily, ver. 16; to the rest of creatures secondarily. As widely extended as was the curse, so widely extended is the blessing."[73] Bengel nicely answers the question: why preach to all creatures, instead of all mankind? Creatures are linked up with humans, because involuntarily, they also suffer the consequences of the human fall. However, the justice of God dictates that grace will be extended to them as well, since they will also participate in the ultimate salvation at Jesus Christ's *Parousia* (Second Coming) at the end of time:

> For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now (Romans 8:19-22).

A valid concern to include non-human creatures in the gospel objective would be that, since they are considered "irrational," having no faculty to understand human language, what is the point of preaching to them? Jesus' so-called "great commission" seems to indicate that they are somewhat capable of understanding the gospel message. If so, it would perhaps suggest that they also have a certain "spirit-like faculty" as that of mankind, which is receptive to God's

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[73] John Albert Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. Andrew R. Fausset, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Co., 1860), 1:575. Bengel (1687–1752) was a Lutheran pietist and Greek-language scholar known for his edition of the Greek New Testament and exegetical annotations on it.

message of salvation. However, that would be wild speculation, at best. What is more reasonable is that, since "the whole world in the evil doth lie" (1 John 5:19b), we cannot rule out the possibility that this "preaching to every creature" is merely a victorious proclamation on the part of Christians who preach the gospel of the resurrection of Christ, which is God's utmost triumph over all evil powers. Based on the MPNS, that all sentient beings possess the Buddha Nature, true self, or *Tathāgatagarbha*, it is enticing to speculate the same universal scope for the Inner Person. The only caveat would be that the Bible simply does not provide us enough support for the existence of the true self, the Inner Person, inside all creatures. The Biblical concept of the Inner Person seems to be confined to the human race. Consequently, we need to rein in our imagination and just leave the disparity unresolved.

In another passage of the MPNS, the stance of the existence of self is defended against the nihilistic, no-self position, using a method of argumentation similar to the "two truths" doctrine.

> 世間之人,亦說有我;佛法之中,亦說有我;世間之人雖說有我,無有佛性;是則名為於無我中而生我想,是名顛倒。佛法有我,即是佛性;世間之人說佛法無我,是名我中生無我想。若言佛法必定無我,是故如來勅諸弟子,修習無我，名為顛倒，是名第三顛倒。(T12n0374_p0407a21-26).
>
> (Translation) Secular people may also say that self exists; Buddhist Dharma also says that self exists. Although secular people say that self exists, there is no Buddha Nature. Therefore it is called: producing the thought of self within (the realm of) nonself; it is called cognitive inversion.[74] When Buddhist Dharma says that self exists, it is Buddha Nature. (Conversely,) secular people may say that Buddhist Dharma has no self; it is called: producing the thought of nonself within (the realm of) self. If one says, "there definitely exists no self in the Buddhist Dharma, thus the Tathāgata commanded the disciples to cultivate nonself." This is called cognitive inversion, the third type of cognitive inversion.

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[74] 顛倒 (*diān dǎo*, inversion): "Basic Meaning: inverted; Senses: Cognitive distortion; cognitively distorted, contrary, mistaken. … In Buddhism, this term is used commonly to refer to utterly mistaken perceptions of reality … Skt. *viparyaya*, *paryasta*, *viparita*, *viparīta*; *viparyāsa*, *vipratipatti*, *viparyasta*, *ni-√pat*, *avamūrdha*, *avamūrdhaka*, *patita*, *pāta*, *prapâtayati*, *mithyā*;" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "倒" [Inverted], by Charles Muller and Stephen Hodge, last modified May 18, 2011, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?50.xml+id(%27b5012%27).

In this passage, secular people (implying unawakened souls) are juxtaposed against the Buddhist Dharma. While the former may either say that self exists, or that it does not exist, the latter steadfastly refutes both sides of them. Regardless of what the secular people may say, they always commit cognitive inversion, which can be thought of as a type of nescience (*avidyā*), because they cannot discern what the true self is.

The Buddhist counterpart of the true self would be the false, or deluded self, which is a critical topic in Chán since it relates to one's awakening. As an illustration, we may look at a quote of Mañjuśrī in 《宗鏡錄》(*Zōng Jìng Lù, Records of the Source-Mirror*), a compilation of important Chán materials written by 永明延壽 (Yǒng Míng Yán Shòu, 904-976):[75]

> 夫執妄苦而求離。望聖量而欲修。皆是妄我施為。情識分別。是以大雄垂跡。但示正宗。破妄我。而顯真我之門。斥情識。而歸淨識之道。真我淨識。即平等相。(T48n2016_p0564c27-a02).
>
> (Translation) Now, if one is attached to the suffering of delusion and desires to eliminate it, if one sees the sacred teaching and logic and desires to cultivate oneself, both of these are the enactment of the deluded self.[76, 77, 78] … Once the

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[75] "Yanshou is a major representative of a style of Chan Buddhism that became known as "scholastic," or "words and letters" (*wén zì*) Chan. In contrast to the antinomian rhetoric denouncing doctrinal teaching and institutional ritual as misguided effort and a sign of an unenlightened mind, scholastic Chan conceived the greater Chan movement as both complementary to and fulfilling the goals of a Buddhist tradition predicated on doctrinal teaching and institutional ritual." Albert Welter and Yanshou, *Yongming Yanshou's Conception of Chan in the* Zongjing Lu*: A Special Transmission within the Scriptures* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 45. Welter (1952–) is a scholar of East Asian Buddhism concentrating in Chinese Buddhism. He is Professor and Head of the East Asian Studies Department at the University of Arizona,

[76] 聖量 (*shèng liàng*, sacred teaching and logic): "Basic Meaning: holy teachings and logic, or inference. Senses: Two ways of gleaning the Buddhist truth: one is by relying directly on the scriptures—the words, or teachings of the Buddha (聖言, 聖教); the second is by relying on one's own correctly functioning analytical skills, using logic, or inference 比量." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "聖量" [Holy teachings and logic, or inference], by Charles Muller, last modified September 8, 2001, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E8%81%96%E9%87%8F.

[77] 施為 (*shī wéi*, enactment): "Basic Meaning: to carry out. Senses: To do things; enact." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "施爲" [To carry out], by Charles Muller, last modified February 25, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E6%96%BD%E7%88%B2.

[78] 妄 (*wàng*, deluded): "Basic Meaning: false. Senses: 1) A lie; not true, not real (Skt. *abhūta, mṛṣā, mṛṣā-vāc*). … 2) Delusion, deception. An incorrect view of emptiness … (Skt. *vitatha, mrsā, abhūta-kalpana*). Phenomena arisen by delusion 遍計所執性 (Skt. *kalpanā, kalpanā-mātra, kalpita, parikalpa*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "虛妄" [False], by Charles Muller, last modified March 6, 2016, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?86.xml+id(%27b865b-5984%27).

> authentic doctrines are shown, the deluded self would be rejected, and the gate of true self would manifest; the deluded consciousness would be refuted, and one would return to the path of pure consciousness.[79] True self and pure consciousness are precisely the characteristic of equality.

With this passage in the *Zōng Jìng Lù*, we have a better idea why the Buddha would say that the unenlightened commit cognitive inversion whether they say the self exists or not. The key is to realize the *Tathāgatagarbha* as the True Self. When the unenlightened say that there is self, they inevitably refer to the deluded, or false, self based on the "deluded consciousness" that follows the reign of the bodily senses. The following abridged conversation between the Buddha and Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of supreme wisdom, is an equivalent version of the deluded self in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*:[80]

> 文殊師利言：「如佛所說，有常、有我、有樂、有淨是實義者，諸外道等應有實諦。(T12n0374_p0444a28-29) … 有諸外道復言有我，有所覩見能造作故。(T12n0374_p0444c22-23) … 喘息視眴、壽命役心，受諸苦樂、貪求、瞋恚，如是等法，悉是我相，是故當知必定有我。(T12n0374_p0444c27-29).

> Mañjuśrī said, "Just as you, the Buddha, have mentioned, there is permanence, self, bliss, and purity as the real meaning, [judging by which] the non-Buddhist outsiders (*tīrthikas*) should have the real truth.[81] … Again there are *tīrthikas* who speak of the existence of the self, for the reason that it can witness and produce things. Breathing, vision, life span, mental concerns, and subjection to suffering, joy, greed, desire, and anger; all such dharmas are the characteristics of the self. Therefore it is certain that there exists the self.

> 佛言：「善男子！若有沙門、婆羅門，有常、有樂、有淨、有我者，是非沙門、非婆羅門。何以故？迷於生死，離一切智大導師故。如是沙門、婆羅門等，沈沒諸欲，善法羸損故。(T12n0374_p0445a21-24).

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[79] 情識 (*qíng shì*, deluded consciousness): "Basic Meaning: deluded consciousness. Senses: Deluded discriminations or feelings. The mental functions of unenlightened people. " Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "情識" [Deluded consciousness], by Charles Muller, last modified October 17, 2009, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E6%83%85%E8%AD%98.

[80] "His name in Sanskrit means 'gentle, or sweet, glory.'" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, September 18, 2013, s.v. "Mañjuśrī," https://www.britannica.com/topic/Manjusri.

[81] 外道 (*wài dào*, *tīrthikas*, outsider): "Basic Meaning: non-Buddhist. Senses: 1. A follower of a religious/philosophical tradition that does not accept basic Buddhist positions such as selflessness, infallible karma, the middle way, etc. (Skt. *tīrthika*, *tīrtha-kara*)" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "外道" [Non-Buddhist], by Charles Muller, last modified September 17, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?59.xml+id(%27b5916-9053%27).

> (Translation) The Buddha replied, "Oh, good man, if there are *śramaṇas* (Buddhist monks or nuns) or *brāhmans* (the clerical caste) [who hold] the existence of permanence, bliss, purity, and self, they are not [real] *śramaṇas* and *brāhmans*.[82, 83] Why so? Because they are deluded in life and death, and are separated from the Great Teacher of all wisdom. Because such *śramaṇas* and *brāhmans* are submerged in various desires and thus have ruined the good Dharma.

What Mañjuśrī was confused about was that the religious heathens see the outward acts and phenomena of the self, and thus assert the existence of the self. The Buddha points out for the perplexed disciple that the things the outsiders attribute to the self are only the false self, because they have not departed from the sea of desires and ignorance, and have lost the right Dharma.

On the other hand, when the unenlightened reject the existence of the self, they are denying the *Tathāgatagarbha*, which truly exists in all sentient beings but are concealed so heavily from the unawakened mind. Either they state the existence or nonexistence of the self, it could only show that they are mired in ignorance, *avidyā*, and cannot help but perpetrate inversion of the true Dharma.

In contrast, in Christianity, the realm of the true self would be comparable to the Inner Person, as outlined in our Christianity chapter; but the Bible teaches also a no-self realm. Let us briefly examine this topic. Individually, all martyrs manifest the principle of nonself, because they live only for others, as the apostle Paul opted to stay in the flesh of suffering for the

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[82] 沙門 (*shā mén*, *śramaṇas*, monks or nuns): "Basic Meaning: *śramaṇa*. Senses: 1. Transliteration of the Sanskrit, meaning 'a Buddhist monk' (or nun). A wanderer … A world-renunciant religious practitioner striving for liberation." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "沙門" [Śramaṇa], by Charles Muller, last modified May 31, 2018, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?6c.xml+id(%27b6c99-9580%27).

[83] 婆羅門 (*puó luó mén*, *brāhmans*, clerical caste): "Basic Meaning: brāhman. Senses: 1. A *brahmin*; the *brāhmans*; *brāhmaṇa*; *brāhmanical*. The clerical caste among the four castes in India." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "婆羅門" [Brāhman], by Charles Muller and John Powers, last modified March 28, 2013, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?5a.xml+id(%27b5a46-7f85-9580%27).

churches, rather than to depart the world to be with Christ (a choice not many people are presented with):

> … so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you (Philippians 1:20-24).

But, beyond doubt, the ultimate display of nonself in the Bible would be the *kénōsis* of Jesus Christ:

> Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, lit. "emptied Himself"), and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

A distinction must be made here, though. These examples of nonself in the Bible are more of a moral nature and not at all ontological, such as the Buddhist Scripture emphasizes. The closest to an "ontological nonself" thought in Christianity would be the communal concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, especially in the new heaven and the new earth. That is, at the eschaton (end of the world), the Christian Church will become the Bride of the Son of God for the purpose of uniting with Him; likewise, she will also be transformed into the New Jerusalem, in which God will dwell forever (cf. Revelation 21:2). As far as individuality of the saints are still maintained, it resembles the Buddhist realm of the self, but collectively as the corporate Church, the Body of Christ, and the New Jerusalem, the saints are all absorbed into the divine-human union, which, to a certain degree, bespeaks the realm of the nonself.

As to the deluded self, the New Testament's classic representation would be "the outer person, ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος" (2 Corinthians 4:16). It is also called "the body of death" (Romans 7:24), "the works of darkness" (Romans 13:12), "the old man, which is corrupt according to the

deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22, cf. Colossians 3:9), "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1), "filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness" (James 1:21), "the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4), and so forth, which is to be "put off" or "lay aside." This "outward person" in Christianity seems to have more of a moral connotation than the deluded self in Buddhism that emphasizes more the epistemological aspect.

Before the conclusion of this subsection, one important note must be mentioned. Buddhist *sūtras* often contain seemingly conflicting statements about a doctrine, such as the reality of the self. It is often confusing to the modern mind of binary logic. However, the existence of denominations, sects, schools and branches attest to the internal interpretational divergences in many of the world's largest religions, Christianity and Buddhism included. As regarding the self in MPNS, there is also some ambiguity that is difficult to resolve in a logical manner:

> 善男子！是佛性者實非我也,為眾生故說名為我。善男子！如來有因緣故，說無我為我，真實無我,雖作是說,無有虛妄。善男子！有因緣故,說我為無我,而實有我。為世界故,雖說無我,而無虛妄。佛性無我,如來說我,以其常故。如來是我,而說無我,得自在故。(T12n0374_p0525a28-b06).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, such Buddha Nature, in reality, is not the self. It is only on account of the sentient beings that it was said to be the self. Oh, good man, for certain causes and conditions, the Tathāgata describes nonself as self, when in reality there is no self; even so, there is no falsehood. Oh, good man, for certain causes and conditions, the self is described as nonself, when in reality there is a self. For the world's sake, when nonself is stated, there is no falsehood. The Buddha Nature is selfless, but the Tathāgata asserts self, because he is permanent. The Tathāgata is the self, but nonself is declared, because he has attained omnipotence.[84]

[84] 得自在 (*dé zì zài*, to attain omnipotence): "Basic Meaning: to attain omnipotence. Senses: To attain sovereignty; to attain control, attain freedom, unimpededness, etc. (Skt. *vaśitva-lābha*, *vaśī-bhūta*;" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "得自在" [To attain omnipotence], by Charles Muller, last modified June 30, 2011, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?5f.xml+id(%27b5f97-81ea-5728%27).

The interesting part of this passage is that it neither affirms, nor negates the self, or the nonself, as if these two are inseparable aspects of the same truth. The last phrase 得自在故 (*dé zì zài gù*), *because he has attained omnipotence*, is translated by Yamamoto as "because he has unmolestedness."[85] In any case, the Chinese text has the literal meaning of "possessing sovereign freedom" to act whichever way one deems proper. For someone who has surpassed the ordinary human sphere of logics, this indicates a realm beyond cataphasis, attainable only by a truly enlightened master.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul also exhibits such multivalency, as illustrated by his autobiographical depiction of the well-known extramundane vision of rapture:

> I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities (2 Corinthians 12:2-5).

Was this a psychodelic illusion that the apostle Paul is describing? That possibility is so minuscule as to be nonexistent, because the experience had been through fourteen years of precipitation and reflection. If it had been merely an incident of psychosis, would not doubts have arisen after such a long time? For an ordinary person they certainly would, let alone an apostle of the stature like Paul, especially when he stresses so much on the renewal and safeguard of the mind – "… be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2); "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Ephesians 4:23). If this is true, that the experience of Paul was genuine, then why would he say twice that he does not know whether he was "in the body, or out of the

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[85] Page, *The Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, 371.

body"? If it had been a corporeal event, he would have known it for sure, as any clearly conscious person would. What would be the reason that even the keenly aware apostle Paul could not tell the difference between "in" or "out of" the body? In this case, we cannot rule out the possibility that it was his Inner Person that had been transported to the third heaven, perhaps even "out of the body," as he says. In Meyer's commentary, this Inner Person would be called the Ego:

> Paul speaks of himself as of a third person, because he wishes to adduce something in which no part of the glory at all falls on the Ego proper. … In that ecstasy the Ego had indeed really ceased to be the *subject of its own activity*, and had become quite the *object of the activity of others*, so that Paul in his usual condition came before himself as other than he had been in the ecstasy, and his *I*, considered from the standpoint of that ecstasy, appeared as a *he*.[86]

If it was indeed the Inner Person of Paul that was raptured, and since he mentioned twice that he did not know whether it was "in the body or out of the body," this would indicate that the Inner Person has no fixed dwelling place, which would be a proposition that parallels the Buddha Nature, as the Buddha told Kāśyapa, "the Tathāgata body … lives in no-dwelling place 住無住處 (*zhù wú zhù chù*)" (T12n0374_ p0383a16).

To sum up, both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, in their own unique terms, exhibit two realms, both as true self and as nonself. This paradox is non-contradictory to the awakened souls, who have obtained complete sovereign freedom because they have transcended the ordinary binary system of the world, in which the deluded self or the old self in the respective cases dominates so strongly that the true self is completely obscured and nonfunctional. In both Buddhism and Christianity, removing the obstruction of the false self becomes a most urgent and critical matter for one's liberation/salvation.

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[86] Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians*, rev. and ed. William P. Dickson, trans. David Hunter, Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 5-6 (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1879), 463–64. Italics original.

## The Immutable

Since Buddha Nature is innate from eternity, it naturally could be hypothesized that this nature is permanent, meaning unaffected by karma during the endless *saṃsāra* cycles. Indeed, the MPNS teaches this exact point:

> 善男子！如來亦爾，於諸眾生猶如良醫，知諸煩惱體相差別而為除斷,開示如來祕密之藏,清淨佛性常住不變。(T12n0374_p0410c04-06).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, the Tathāgata also, is like a proficient physician to the sentient beings, who knows the different afflicted bodily characteristics and removes [the defilements] for them. He reveals to them the secret *Tathāgatagarbha* as pure, undefiled Buddha Nature that is permanent and immutable.
>
> 有智之人，應當分別,不應盡言一切無常。何以故？我身即有佛性種子。若說無我,凡夫當謂一切佛法悉無有我;智者應當分別無我假名不實。如是知已,不應生疑。若言如來祕藏空寂,凡夫聞之,生斷滅見;有智之人應當分別,如來是常、無有變易。(T12n0374_p0410c12-18).
>
> (Translation) People with wisdom should discern and not assert that all things are impermanent. Why so? Within the body of the self there is the seed of Buddha Nature. If no-self is affirmed, commoners would say that all Buddhist dharmas are lacking the self, but the wise should discern that nonself is a designatory label and not a reality. Having known this, there should not be any doubts. If it is said that the secret *Tathāgatagarbha* is empty, when commoners hear it, they would engender the perception of extinction.[87] People with wisdom should discern that the Tathāgata is permanent, immutable.
>
> 佛性常恒、無有變易,無明覆故,令諸眾生不能得見。(T12n0374_p0523b19-20).
>
> (Translation) The Buddha Nature is permanent and eternal, without any change. Since it is covered by nescience (avidyā), sentient beings cannot see it.

In the first passage, the Buddha reveals that the secret *Tathāgatagarbha* is Buddha Nature and it abides permanently and immutably. In the second passage, the words of the Buddha

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[87] 斷滅 (duàn miè, extinction): "Basic Meaning: to eradicate. Senses: * To quench, put out, exterminate … (Skt. *uccheda*, *upaśānti*, *prahāna*). * Cessation, nirvana. * Nihilism. A nihilistic approach. …." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "斷滅" [To Eradicate], by Charles Muller, last modified November 13, 2007, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?65.xml+id(%27b65b7-6ec5%27).

decisively refute the no-self "heresy," by assigning it to the category of "designatory label" (假名, lit. false name). As such, nonself is surely not to be taken as true. Furthermore, He avers the permanency and immutability of the Tathāgata, or by implication, of the *Tathāgatagarbha*. The third quote straightforwardly states the immutability of the Buddha Nature, and also the reason why the unenlightened do not see it.

Earlier, we have argued for the possibility of the Bible teaching that at least the blueprint of the Inner Person existed "before foundation of [the] cosmos to exist" or "before times of eternities" (cf. the subsection entitled "The Eternal"). Even if the preexistence case should prove untenable, that the Inner Person has a beginning at the moment God breathed it out into Adam, it is still permanent and imperishable. Such fact may be gleaned from the apostle Paul's statement that, contra the "outward person," the Inner Person perishes not, because it is "renewed (ἀνακαινοῦται, to renovate) day by day." It may seem that this last phrase implies that the Inner Person is mutable, but the "renovation" could reasonably be conceived as just a type of "decoration" that does not influence the core substance. This is in conformance with the apostle Peter's verse referring to ornamentation: "But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:4). Besides the spiritual ornament that Peter urged the Christian to put on, he also affirms the incorruptibility of the Inner Person. Recalling that the Inner Person derives its divinity from Jesus Christ, we may also conclude that its divinity is immutable, since "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). Expanding further, the Father is naturally also immutable: "… the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17b).

Other than permanency, the Buddha disclosed to Mañjuśrī the following "four ontological truths" regarding the *Tathāgatagarbha*:

> 「善男子！有常、有樂、有我、有淨，是則名為實諦之義。」文殊師利白佛言：「世尊！若以真實為實諦者,真實之法即是如來、虛空、佛性。若如是者,如來、虛空及與佛性無有差別。」(T12n0374_p0443b26-27).
>
> (Translation) "Oh, good man, there exists permanency; there is bliss; there is self; and there is purity. These are called the definition of ultimate truth (*satya*)."[88, 89] Mañjuśrī answered the Buddha: "Oh, World-Honored One, if you deem real truth as *satya*, then the Dharma of real truth is the Tathāgata, the Emptiness, and the Buddha Nature. If so, then the Tathāgata, the Emptiness, and the Buddha Nature are indistinguishable.

Besides the nature of purity, permanency and self of the Inner Person, is it also blissful? When the apostle Paul said that the Inner Person is renewed day by day, he immediately added: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). How can the Inner Person not be blissful, seeing that such weighty glory is its future, eternal destination? It is a glory so enduring and significant that in comparison, the present affliction seems "light." This profound and present joy is when one realizes its source to be "pleasing God," as indicated by the apostle Paul "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7:22). Realizing that his position is now in Jesus Christ, Paul is able to proclaim in the end the triumph of the pure devotion of the Inner Person, even while still in the corruptible flesh: "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:25b). If even in this life, the Inner Person finds delight amidst affliction, then in the next life, the joy will be a perfect one: "For I am in a strait

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[88] 常 (*cháng*, permanent): "Basic Meaning: permanent; Senses: Eternal, always (Skt. *nitya*; *śāśvata*). Prolonged, constant, always, unceasing, permanent, perpetual, ever." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "常" [Permanent], by Charles Muller, last modified May 25, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?5e.xml+id(%27b5e38%27).

[89] 實諦 (*shí dì*, *satya*, ultimate truth): "Basic Meaning: a real truth. Senses: A truth; reality; the true statement of a fundamental principle. Ultimate truth 眞諦 as distinguished from a provisional, or conventional truth 世諦. Syn. with 一諦 (Skt. *satya*, *satya-satya*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "實諦" [A real truth], last modified February 20, 2011, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?5b.xml+id(%27b5be6-8ae6%27).

betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). The longing for the righteousness of God's law shall reap eternal reward, as promised by Jesus Himself: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Many prophets in the Old Testament also attest to this bliss, including the psalmist, King David: "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Psalms 4:7, cf. chapter two, subsection "The Heart" under "The Spiritual Meaning of the Inner Person"). Therefore the *Tathāgatagarbha's* attributes of permanency, bliss, self and purity corresponds well with the Inner Person. although, of course, they are not directly one-to-one equivalent.

In addition to the positive statements about the permanency of the *Tathāgatagarbha*, there is also a string of negative portrayal of the Buddha nature. Explaining deeper still to Mañjuśrī, the Buddha stated:

> 善男子！佛性無生、無滅、無去、無來,非過去、非未來、非現在,非因、所作、非無因作,非作、非作者,非相、非無相,非有名、非無名,非名、非色、非長、非短、非陰界入之所攝持,是故名常。善男子！佛性即是如來，如來即是法，法即是常。(T12n0374_p0445b29-c05).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, the Buddha Nature has no birth, no extinction, no going, no coming; it is not past, not future, not present, not made by a cause, not made without a cause, not making, not the maker, not character, not non-character, not named, not unnamed, not a name, not phenomena, not long, not short, and not maintained by the "aggregates, elements, and bases"; therefore it is called permanent.[90, 91] Oh, good man, Buddha Nature is precisely the Tathāgata, and the Tathāgata is precisely Dharma, and Dharma is precisely permanence.

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[90] 攝持 (*shè chí*, to maintain): "Basic Meaning: to gather and keep. Senses: To collect and maintain (Skt. *parigraha*, *saṃgraha*, *adhiṣṭhāna*, *anugraha*, *anuparigṛhīta*, *anuparigraha*, *ādhāna*, *udgṛhīta*, *upastambhana*, *saṃdhāritatva*, *saṃgraha*, *sthairya*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “攝持” [To gather and keep], by Charles Muller, last modified January 11, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?65.xml+id(%27b651d-6301%27).

[91] 陰界入 (*yīn jiè rù*, aggregates, elements, and bases): "Basic Meaning: aggregates, elements, and bases. Senses: (Skt. *skandha-dhātv-āyatana*, *skandhâyatana-dhātu*) The five aggregates 五陰, twelve sense bases 十二入, and eighteen elements of cognition 十八界." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “陰界入” [Aggregates, elements,

Similar to such negation of the Buddha Nature, in the Book of Hebrews, it is stated: "… this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God … Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (Hebrews 7:1-3). Such wondrous attribution to Melchisedec definitely does not refer to the historical figure as depicted in Genesis chapter fourteen (vv. 18-20), nor any natural human being, for that matter. Could the author of Hebrews, by this "surrealistic" ascription, intend to implicate the Inner Person? What clues us in would be the phrases "made like unto the Son of God" and "abideth a priest continually." The former echoes that familiar pre-creational declaration of YHWH: "… Let us make man in our image, after our likeness …" (Genesis 1:26), and the subsequent divine action: "So God created man in His own image" (v. 27). Verse 26 indicates what was planned in the counsel of the Godhead, using the plural genitive case (Our image); but in actual execution (v. 27), the description becomes singular genitive (His image), indicating that a representative Figure – the Son – was the actual prototype of the human image. Thus, we may infer that the Inner Person would be the deepest, spiritual image of God stamped within humanity.

The phrase "abideth a priest continually" links up with the apostle Peter's teaching: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9a). And we are told that based on the thought that the New Testament era believers are the spiritual embodiment of the Old Testament Levitical priests, Martin Luther, the father of Reformation, innovated the doctrine of "priesthood of all believers," which helped set the foundation for Protestantism.[92, 93] A priest, by the Old Testament definition, is a mediator between God and His

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and bases], by Charles Muller, last modified March 16, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?96.xml+id(%27b9670-754c-5165%27).

[92] "[Quoting Luther:] In fact, we are all consecrated priests through Baptism, as St. Peter in 1 Peter 2[:9] says, 'You are a royal priesthood and a priestly kingdom,' and Revelation [5:10], 'Through your blood you have

people, since he offers sacrifices to God for the redemption of the people's sins. Likewise, is not the Inner Person also a "permanent resident priest" who communicates God's will to His children and leads them to draw near the Father? Therefore, with the Hebrews passage, the other-worldliness of the Inner Person can be deemed a Christian counterpart to the transcendent negation of the Buddha Nature just quoted.

In this great negation on Buddha Nature, almost all phenomena in the world are denied about it. That is not surprising, because nothing pertaining to the human ordinary senses and consciousness is permanent, save the *Tathāgatagarbha* within, which alone is imperishable and immutable. After disclosing these negative aspects, turning around with positive affirmations, the Buddha explicated the immutability of Buddha Nature further:

> 善男子！一切有為，皆是無常；虛空無為是故為常,佛性無為是故為常。虛空者即是佛性,佛性者即是如來,如來者即是無為,無為者即是常。常者即是法，法者即是僧，僧即無為，無為者即是常。(T12n0374_p0445c12-16).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, all conditioned (phenomena) are impermanent.[94] Emptiness is unconditioned, and thus is permanent. Buddha nature is unconditioned, and thus is permanent. Emptiness is precisely Buddha Nature. Buddha nature is precisely Tathāgata. Tathāgata is precisely unconditioned. What is unconditioned is precisely permanent. What is permanent is precisely Dharma.

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made us into priests and kings.'" Timothy Wengert, "The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths," *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers*, January 1, 2005, 12, https://web.archive.org/web/20151011213718/http://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ils_papers. Wengert (1950–) is Ministerium of Pennsylvania Professor of Church History at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

[93] "Protestantism originated in the 16th-century Reformation, and its basic doctrines, in addition to those of the ancient Christian creeds, are justification by grace alone through faith, the priesthood of all believers, and the supremacy of Holy Scripture in matters of faith and order." James C. Spalding, E. Clifford Nelson, and Martin E. Marty, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 28, 2016, s.v. "The Protestant Heritage," https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Protestant-Heritage-1354359.

[94] 有為 (*yǒu wéi*, conditioned [phenomena]): "Basic Meaning: conditioned phenomena. Senses: Manifest phenomena that are created as the synthesis of causes and conditions. … (Skt. *saṃskṛta*, *saṃskṛta-dharmāḥ*, *saṃskṛta-dharma*, *saṃskṛtādharmāḥ*, *saṃskāra*, *saṃskṛta*, *saṃskṛta-lakṣaṇa*, *lakṣya*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "有爲法" [Conditioned phenomena], by Charles Muller, last modified December 7, 2020, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?67.xml+id(%27b6709-7232-6cd5%27).

> Dharma is precisely *saṃgha*.[95] *Saṃgha* is precisely the unconditioned. What is unconditioned is precisely permanent.

What Gautama Buddha brings out in this passage is the contrasts between the conditioned phenomena (有為法 *yǒu wéi fǎ*) and the unconditioned phenomena (無為法 *wú wéi fǎ*). What is meant by being "conditioned"? It is defined as: "Manifest phenomena that are created as the synthesis of causes and conditions. That which is created by cause and condition, and which arises, changes and ceases. That which is created through the function of karma."[96] Yamamoto translates it simply as: "what is made."[97] The Chinese term for unconditioned phenomena, 無為法 *wú wéi fǎ*, is borrowed from the vocabulary of ancient Chinese Daoism. However, 無為 *wú wéi* originally means passivity or "non-action" – a "concept of naturalness in some ways similar to those of the Stoics and Aristotle."[98] In Buddhism, though, the same term describes the characteristic of being not dependent on other phenomena. In other words, 無為 *wú wéi* puts the Buddha Nature outside the law of dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*), and of karma. From this significance, the Buddha derived that Emptiness, Buddha Nature, Tathāgata, Dharma, and *Saṃgha* are all equivalent, and are permanent and immutable.

The Christian Bible also contains similar "passivity," albeit not often noticed. It is especially prevalent in relation to soteriology:

> "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall

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[95] 僧 (*sēng*, *saṃgha*): "Basic Meaning: meeting of the saṃgha. Senses: An assembly of monks. Also translated as 僧伽 (Skt. *saṃgha*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "衆和合" [Meeting of the saṃgha], by Charles Muller, last modified February 27, 2014, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?88.xml+id(%27b8846-548c-5408%27).

[96] Muller, s.v. "有爲法" [Conditioned phenomena].

[97] Page, *The Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, 188.

[98] Jonathan Chan, "Daoism and Bioethics: Daode Jin's Doctrine of Naturalness and the Principle of Non-Action," in *Religious Perspectives in Bioethics*, ed. Mark J. Cherry (Leiden, Neth.: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 226, ProQuest Ebook Central.

> the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:7-8).
>
> " … When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad" (Psalms 126:1-3).

The Isaiah passage elucidates that the force behind the establishment and proliferation of the Church of God (Zion) is singularly God. Only He alone may carry out such powerful and amazing acts of procreation, and the Church stands passively as the recipient and beneficiary of His unparallel abundance. The passage from Psalms is even more unimaginable – while Zion is still in dreams, YHWH has already accomplished her salvation.

Furthermore, in the Reformation era, the Protestants, in protestation to the corrupt Roman Catholic Church, promulgated the so-called "five *solas*" doctrines, among which is *justificatio sola fide* – justification by faith alone. In the tenet, "a contrast is being made with Rome's doctrine that faith must be formed by love (*fides formata*). The Reformed and Lutheran churches said that Rome essentially required faith and works for justification."[99] To say that this tenet is the "passivity" in Protestantism would not be too exorbitant, since it essentially excludes human "works" and "merits" from the requisite of salvation. What is even more "passive" would be the "predestination" doctrine so well-known in Calvinism, which was already advocated by Augustine of Hippo.[100] This thought is based on the belief in God's sovereignty and omniscience, and found Biblical support mainly in Romans chapter eight: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn

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[99] R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology.*, Doing Theology (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), 77, http://qut.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=592420. Allen (1981–) is John Dyer Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

[100] Matthew Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 44. Levering (1971–) is James N. and Mary D. Perry Jr. Chair of Theology at Mundelein Seminary in Illinois, and Co-Director of the Chicago Theological Initiative.

among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (vv. 29-30). This weighty passage encompasses such wide range of the salvation of God, and concisely epitomizes the Christian soteriology in five stages: foreknowing, predestinating, calling, justification, and glorification – all on the part of God without any trace of human effort, work, or merit. What is the role of the Inner Person here? At the very most, it just needs to appropriately respond to the calling of God, then all the rest is accomplished without human intervention. This Pauline passage would represent the utmost passivity and resemblance to 無為 *wú wéi* in Christendom, and for the Inner Person, too.

In this subsection, we have compared the *Tathāgatagarbha* with the Inner Person in the aspect of not only immutability, but also related attributes such as bliss, transcendence, and passivity and found them to present a fascinating comparative picture.

## The Hidden

In the previous Buddhism chapter, there is a subsection entitled "The Secrecy and Hiddenness of the *Tathāgatagarbha*," where the secrecy was explained in terms of the *Nirvāna Sūtra's* use of such adjectives as secret (祕密 *mì mì*), hidden (祕藏 *mì zàng*), subtle (微妙 *wéi miào*), etc. This type of language emphasizes not only the hidden nature, but also the rarity (in terms of the number of beings who find it) and the preciousness (in terms of its essentiality to awakening and liberation) of the *garbha*. On the Christian side, the fact that the Inner Person is so little mentioned in the New Testament is itself a testimonial to the secrecy of it. Additionally, in the Gospel of Matthew, the earthly Jesus also tells a parable to the same effect: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he

hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field" (Matthew 13:44). Notice that when the fortunate man found the treasure, his reaction was to hide it, not to dig it up and possess it immediately. He then sells all his belongings to buy the field, and then … the parable abruptly ends, without further elaborating how or whether the man subsequently retrieve and take possession of the treasure, or more practically, now that he owned nothing but the field, how he survived. But a parable is supposed to make certain moral point(s) without regards to ordinary logic or concerns. From this parable and other Biblical teachings, we may generally conclude that deep spiritual truths tend to come in disguising cloaks, just as the Old Testament Tabernacle had an outer layer of coarse badgers' skins (cf. Exodus 26:14), and as MacLaren commented, "God's treasure comes to the world in a form which to a great many people veils, if it does not altogether hide, its preciousness."[101] The Inner Person, being God's precious creation, naturally takes on the secrecy of its heavenly Father. Its deepest communication with the Father should also be hidden, as Jesus taught: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret (ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ) shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6).

If the Father is a self-hiding God ("Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour," Isaiah 45:15), then His incarnate Son is yet another kind of disguise, a blessing in disguise indeed. It is because Jesus Christ came to the world with scarcely any stately "form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2b). The most glorious Son of God came to the world to save sinners, not in His awe-inspiring majesty nor eye-blinding brilliance, but in lowly humility so as to hide His true identity

[101] Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture* (Fort Collins, CO: Delmarva Publication, 2013).

from the proud and the shrewd of the world, only to reveal Himself to the humble, as it is written: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). As the Creator and the Savior are secret, so is the Inner Person – all are hidden from the casual curious onlooker, and from the intelligent, arrogant accuser, but are reserved for the meek, diligent seeker: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7). Additionally, the paradoxical characteristic of the Savior is well attested by the apostle Paul:

> For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:21-25).

And the apostle Peter is also straightforward about this :

> If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. … Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed (1 Peter 2:3-8).

Thus, not only is Jesus Christ a holy treasure "hidden in plain sight," easily bypassed as insignificant, but He can even be a "stumbling block," and "a rock of offence" to many. In the parable of the treasure in the field, the kingdom of heaven is, like the Inner Person and the *Tathāgatagarbha*, apparently something to be kept secret to the "outsiders" ("… Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." v.

11), because sacred matters are nothing to be boasting about, nor taken lightly. In fact, sacred revelation is often entrusted to a person to be well-guarded: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" (Matthew 7:6). So, on the one hand, Jesus taught that it is a Christian responsibility to preach the gospel. Yet, on the other, certain revelations belong to the secret, private domain, and should not be heedlessly divulged, especially to the wrong persons. This caution is not only for the sake of upholding the sacredness of the revelation, but also for the protection of the person committed with such truths, to prevent their persecution.

Hiddenness of the *Tathāgatagarbha* is described not only ontologically, but also epistemologically. The MPNS has the following passage that compares those not fully awakened ones with the enlightened ones:

> 善男子！一切菩薩住九地者,見法有性,以是見故,不見佛性,若見佛性,則不復見一切法性。以修如是空三昧故,不見法性,以不見故,則見佛性。諸佛菩薩有二種說：一者有性，二者無性。為眾生故說有法性，為諸賢聖說無法性。(T12n0374_p0521b01-06).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, all those bodhisattvas who remain in the ninth ground see that dharmas have (self-) nature, due to which preoccupation, they do not see the Buddha Nature. Had they seen the Buddha Nature, they would no longer see the (self-) nature of all dharmas. Due to the cultivation of such *samādhi* of emptiness, one no longer sees the (self-) nature of all dharmas. Not seeing it, one would see the Buddha Nature. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have two kinds of teachings: one is that there exists (self-) nature; the other is no (self-) nature. For the sentient beings, it is taught that there exists (self-) nature in dharmas. For the sages and saints, it is taught that there exists no (self-) nature in dharmas.

Two principles are disclosed here. One is that the preconception of the existence of self-nature in dharmas (which is against the emptiness doctrine) would impede one's enlightenment (seeing the Buddha Nature). In the New Testament, the apostle John speaks of a similar contrast, between the world and the Father: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. … And the world passeth away, and

the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). Who is the one that follows God's will? Is it not precisely the Inner Person mentioned by the apostle Paul in Romans chapter seven – "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man"? Who is the one that abides forever? Is it not exactly the Inner Person of Second Corinthians – "the inward man is renewed day by day"?

The second principle of the MPNS again refers to the "two truths" (*satya-dvaya* 二諦 *èr dì*) doctrine of Sakyamuni as unveiled by Nāgārjuna: "A truth of worldly convention and an ultimate truth."[102] The worldly convention is for the sentient beings that are not enlightened to such truth, which can only be communicated to the sages and saints. This principle immediately begs the questions: why is the ultimate truth reserved for the awakened souls, but not for other sentient beings? Why do the former still need more truth since they are already awakened? Do not the latter need it more than the former in order to be liberated from their ignorance? Apparently, here the neediness of the sentient beings is not a criteria for dissemination of the truth. Related to this regard is another passage that shows the selectiveness of the Buddha about the truth of the *Tathāgatagarbha*:

> 如來微密無上法藏,不與聲聞諸弟子等,如汝寶藏不示惡子;要當付囑諸菩薩等,如汝寶藏委付善子。何以故？聲聞弟子生變異想,謂佛如來真實滅度,然我真實不滅度也。(T12n0374_p0385c21-25).
>
> (Translation) The Tathāgata's subtle, secret and supreme dharma *garbha* is not transmitted to disciples who are (merely) voice-hearers (*śrāvakas*), just as you do not show your treasure to your wicked son.[103] Rather, [the *garbha*] should be

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[102] Nāgārjuna and Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's* Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 296. Garfield (1955–) is Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities at Smith College in Massachusetts, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Melbourne, visiting professor of philosophy and Buddhist studies at Harvard Divinity School, and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Central University of Tibetan Studies in India.

[103] 聲聞 (*shēng wén*, *śrāvakas*, voice-hearer): "Basic Meaning: a voice-hearer. Senses: A disciple of the Buddha; a *śrāvaka*. T 262.9.38a3. (Skt. *śrāvakayānīya*)" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "聲聞人" [A voice-hearer], by Seishi Karashima, last modified July 13, 2009, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?80.xml+id(%27b8072-805e-4eba%27).

> committed to the *bodhisattvas*, just as you entrust your treasure to your good son. Why so? It is because *śrāvakas* (always) conjure up notions of change, and say that the Buddha Tathāgata factually passes away into extinction.[104] However, I truly do not passes away into extinction.

The two classes of objects of the Buddha's revelation are compared to good and wicked sons. And the reason for not disclosing the truth to those "voice-hearers" is because they would distort the truth due to ignorance. Note that the "voice-hearers" are not just some secular people, but are actually considered disciples of the Buddha. In other words, they have made certain difficult determination to follow the Master by giving up the secular life; they do care enough about spiritual matters to make such sacrifices. Nevertheless, due to their *avidyā*, they are comparable to "wicked sons" who should not receive valuable inheritance. This is not an easy saying to swallow, indeed.

In the New Testament, a similar "discriminatory" paradox is taught by Jesus:

> And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Matthew 13:10-15).

What is a parable? The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "a short, simple story that teaches or explains an idea, especially a moral or religious idea."[105] Due to benign definitions

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[104] 變異 (*biàn yì*, change): "Basic Meaning: to change. Senses: To alter; become different; to become otherwise; change, transformation (Skt. *vikāra, vikrti, pariṇāma*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "變異" [To change], by Charles Muller, last modified June 10, 2015, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?8b.xml+id(%27b8b8a-7570%27).

[105] Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "Parable," accessed July 13, 2022, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/parable.

such as this, many Christians thus have the notion that it is for the purpose of illustration and edification to benefit the audience and eventually effect their salvation. For example, it is stated that "a 'parable' is an illustrative story, by which a familiar idea is cast beside an unfamiliar idea in such a way that the comparison helps people to better understand grasp the unfamiliar idea. A simple story is told, certain features of which are analogous or parallel to the points or principles one wishes to drive home."[106] This is a well-intended effort to portray Jesus as a good, godly teacher concerned about the welfare of mankind. However, there is at least another lesser-known aspect of parables that does not paint such a rosy picture. Wellman observes that "parables were given to hide the meaning from those who choose to reject Jesus and the message of God and to clarify or give a fuller meaning and understanding to those who believed on the Lord."[107] The Catholic Encyclopedia explains this double-edged sword in this manner: "As uttering one thing and signifying something else, it [a parable] is in the nature of a riddle … and has therefore a light and a dark side …."[108] Bacon is quoted as saying: "Among men a twofold usage of parables has been discovered and has grown into fashion, so that, what is still more remarkable, they are applied to opposite purposes. For parables are serviceable as a mask and veil, and also for elucidation and illustration."[109]

The above passage from Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, effectively, that certain of His audience are not worthy to receive the truth. Not only were the parables of no avail to this group

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[106] Ron Graham, "Meaning of Parable Defined (What Is a Parable, and How Is It Interpreted?)," simplybible.com, accessed July 14, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20220517005903/https://www.simplybible.com/f663-what-is-a-parable-defined.htm.

[107] Jack Wellman, "What Is A Parable? A Bible Definition," Christian Crier, May 23, 2014, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2014/05/22/what-is-a-parable-a-bible-definition/. Wellman is Pastor of the Mulvane Brethren church in Mulvane Kansas, and also the Senior Writer at What Christians Want To Know.

[108] William Barry, *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles G. Herbermann et al., vol. 11, *New Mexico–Philip* (New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1913), s.v. "Parables."

[109] Richard Chenevix Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1906), 12. Trench (1807–1886) was an Anglican archbishop and had served as theological chair at King's College in London.

of hearers for salvific purpose, but these stories were preached to them so that "from him shall be taken away even that he hath" – in other words, to deprive, rather than to enrich, such persons. Taking these words at face value, and at the risk of being labeled as anti-Christian, I venture to say that, because of their hardened heart, or simply "having not," Jesus' parables serve as a severe instrument of God to actually *prevent* their salvation – "lest at any time they … should be converted, and I should heal them." This double-purpose of benefiting those to whom "it is given … to know the mysteries," and forsaking those to whom it is not, is a great demonstration of the discriminatory nature of God's truth. It is also a solid evidence, if not irrefutable proof, of the existence of "double predestination," of which Jean Calvin is well known as a staunch supporter, but St. Augustine is more ambiguously in agreement.[110] This doctrine can be seen as the consequential extension of the sovereign hiddenness of God in the Christian New Testament, effectively "hiding Himself" from those who are declined the grace of salvation.

In sum, secrecy is one of the main features of both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, whether ontologically or epistemologically speaking, only because they are so precious in relationship to one's eventual destiny. And it seems that in both cases, the reject or the reprobate bears certain degree of responsibility for such treatment and status.

## The Mystical

The title of this subsection uses one of the two adjectives of the word *mystery* with the other one being "mysterious." The reason for not using the latter is because it carries the common conception "of obscure nature, meaning, origin, etc.; puzzling; inexplicable" especially in

[110] Frank A. James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination: The Augustinian Inheritance of an Italian Reformer*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 29–30, 102. James is the president of Missio Seminary in Hatfield, Pennsylvania and had formerly served as Professor of Historical Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

American English, which is somewhat more negative than our present choice of *mystical*.[111] Vine writes that the Greek word *μυστήριον* (*musterion*, or *mystery*) means "primarily that which is known to the *mústēs* (μύστης), 'the initiated' (from *muéō* [μυέω], 'to initiate into the mysteries,'" and confirms the above assessment that this New Testament notion, as already quoted in the Preface, "denotes not the mysterious (as with the Eng. word), but that which, being outside the range of unassisted natural apprehension, can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God, and to those only who are illumined by His Spirit."[112] A good proof is this verse: "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints" (Colossians 1:26). Therefore, given that the intention of this subsection is to express the characteristics associated with the sacred mystery that is contained in both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, the word *mystical* seems more fitting. To that end, mystery and hiddenness (see previous subsection) are two closely related topics, since what is intentionally and providentially hidden from ordinary humans, in most cases, falls into the category of mystery, although the two words do have distinct connotations.

In analyzing the topic of mystery, it is remarkable that the *Nirvāna Sūtra* has a long "apophatic" list of the attributes of the Tathāgata's mystical body. Here we especially highlight some characteristics that are relevant to the topic of mystery.

> 善男子！汝今當知 … 如來之身非身 … 無量無邊、無有足跡、無知無形 … 不可思議、常不可思議 … 無有亦有 … 非有非無、非覺非觀、非字非不字、非定非不定 … 住無住處 … 是空離空 … 非一非異、非像非相 … 不可覩見、無有相貌。(T12n0374_p0383a04-21).

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[111] *Collins English Dictionary*, s.v. "Mysterious," accessed July 20, 2022, https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/mysterious.

[112] Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, s.v. "MYSTERY."

> (Translation) Oh, good man, now you ought to know that … the Tathāgata body is not (an ordinary) body … it is without quantization or bounds, without any footprints, without recognition or forms … inconceivable and eternally so, … not possessing yet possessing … not existent nor nonexistent, not tangible nor visible, not literal nor non-literal, not determinant nor indeterminant, … dwelling in non-dwelling place, … empty yet apart from empty … neither unity nor differentiation, neither likeness nor characteristics … invisible, and lacking forms or countenance.

This passage puts the Tathāgata body in such great enigma that the unenlightened mind easily gets confounded. Such ambiguity and paradox in the Buddhist central object of salvation, *Tathāgatagarbha*, do find a parallel in the Christian Bible. For example, on the one hand, light is attributed to God: "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5b), and "… the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see …" (1 Timothy 6:15-16); but, on the other hand, there are also indications that God dwells in darkness: "… The LORD said that He would dwell in the thick darkness" (1 Kings 8:12), "He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies" (Psalms 18:11), and "Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne" (Psalms 97:2). So, if God is light, would He not be the most brilliant luminosity in the universe, which nothing can obscure or overshadow? And if He dwells in darkness, what does the darkness signify? The psalmist seems to point out that light and darkness make no difference to God: "Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee" (Psalms 139:12). That the two opposite ends of the spectrum, light and darkness, are the same to God implies that He encompasses all. Light elucidates certain aspects of God – love, mercy, longsuffering, providence, etc. Similarly, darkness reflects other sides of God – justice, righteousness, wrath, judgment, and so forth. Light and darkness are inseparable facets of God, which cause all things to "work together … according to His purpose" (Romans

8:28). Light and darkness put together may be enigmatic to the human mind, but they are an integral whole in God, just like the black-and-white entangled circle of Daoism, and just like the Tathāgata body described above – unfathomable to ordinary souls, but lucid to the enlightened, as another MPNS passage indicates:

> 善男子！佛性者名第一義空，第一義空名為智慧。所言空者,不見空與不空。智者見空及與不空、常與無常、苦之與樂、我與無我。空者一切生死,不空者謂大涅槃;乃至無我者即是生死,我者謂大涅槃。見一切空,不見不空,不名中道;乃至見一切無我,不見我者,不名中道,中道者名為佛性。(T12n0374_p0523b12-18).
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> (Translation) Oh, good man, the Buddha Nature is the emptiness of the ultimate truth (*paramârtha*); the emptiness of the ultimate truth is called wisdom.[113] What is called empty has no emptiness nor non-emptiness to be perceived. The wise sees both emptiness and non-emptiness, permanence and non-permanence, suffering and bliss, the self and the nonself. What is empty (refers to) all births and deaths; what is non-empty is called *mahanirvāna*. So, then, what is called nonself is precisely births and deaths; what is self is called *mahanirvāna*. Perceiving that all things are empty without perceiving non-emptiness is not called *Mādhyamaka* [the Middle Way]. So, then, perceiving all phenomena are without the self, but not perceiving the self, is not called *Mādhyamaka*. What is called *Mādhyamaka* is termed Buddha Nature.

The wise is said to comprehend the paradox of truth: emptiness and non-emptiness, self and nonself, etc., because wisdom consists in the Middle Way, seeing reality as it is, which is mystical in nature.

In the aspect of mystery, the apostle Paul makes an astonishing proclamation regarding the Inner Person: "and he who is spiritual (ὁ πνευματικὸς), doth discern indeed (ἀνακρίνει μὲν) all things, and he himself is by no one discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:15, Young's Literal Translation). In the previous verse, which we use in our Christianity chapter as a support for the trichotomistic inclination of the apostle, he sets the "soulish" (soul-dominated) person (ψυχικὸς

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[113] 第一義 (*dì yī yì*, *paramârtha*, ultimate truth): "Basic Meaning: ultimate truth. Senses: Supreme truth, absolute truth. See 勝義諦 (Skt. *paramârtha*; *agra-dharma*, *niṣpanna*, *parama*, *paramâtman*, *pariniṣpanna*, *pāramârthika*, *pramodârtha*;" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "第一義" [Ultimate truth], by Charles Muller, last modified January 14, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?7b.xml+id(%27b7b2c-4e00-7fa9%27).

ἄνθρωπος) in contrast to the spiritual (ὁ πνευματικὸς, v.15). The *Expositor's Greek Testament* describes the former not as a licentious immoral person, but as a noble, though unregenerate one: "Contrasted with the ἀκρατής [lacking self control], the ψυχικὸς is the noblest of men. But to the πνευματικὸς he is related as the natural to the supernatural." This would serve as a caution that we should not think disparagingly of the "soulish" person here. "This epithet, therefore, describes to the [Corinthians] the unregenerate nature *at its best*, the man commended in philosophy, actuated by the higher thoughts and aims of the natural life – not the sensual man … who is ruled by bodily impulse."[114] As for the spiritual person, "Paul sees 'in the Πνεῦμα, the Divine power creatively working in the man and imparted to him, the κριτήριον [criterion] for the right estimate of persons and things, Divine and human. ….'"[115] Is this not redolent of a portrait of the Inner Person being operated on by the Holy Spirit to enable its correct views and judgments? If so, it is of the utmost mystic order, since such divine empowerment transpires within the deepest part of our being, without our "outer person" knowing its mode of operation.

In this regard, Conzelmann considers the spiritual person as being completely taken over by the Holy Spirit: "… the spirit in the pneumatic is the Spirit of God."[116] But he also distinguishes the Spirit in the spiritual person and the Holy Spirit, when he comments on verse 10: "Here it remains an open question to begin with whether [Paul] is speaking of God's Spirit as his power to reveal (in the sense of 'all that God has prepared') or of the divine Spirit in man as that which makes possible the receiving of revelation (in the sense of 'for those who love

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[114] G. G. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1961), 783. Findlay (1849–1919) was Professor of Biblical Literature, Exegesis and Classics at Headingley College in the UK.

[115] Findlay, 2:784. Findlay quoting/translating C. F. G. Heinrici's *Erklärung der Korintherbriefe* (1880), or *1 Korinther* in Meyer's *krit.-exegetisches Kommentar* (1896).

[116] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 69. Conzelmann (1915–1989) served on the theological faculties at Tübingen, Heidelberg, Zürich, and Göttingen.

him')."[117] If such distinction is ontologically directed, then "the divine Spirit in man" arguably points to the human spirit, or the Inner Person, which in the case of the spiritual person is indwelt by and united with the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is not surprising that this divinely endowed human spirit in the spiritual person is capable of receiving the mysteries of God: "[Paul] speaks in a way that takes no account of the historic character of revelation, but solely of the illumination of the recipients. The object of knowledge is not the historic Christ, but the mystery …" The non-rationalistic, metaphysical knowledge, therefore, links up the spirit with wisdom:

> The concept is taken up and transposed into the typical wisdom style of Hellenistic Judaism in the Wisdom of Solomon, where σοφία [wisdom] is defined as a πνεῦμα [spirit]. This transformation is one of the presuppositions in Paul. There is also another: knowledge is no longer rationally attained … but by means of "illumination." … Knowledge has to do with supranatural things and itself becomes a supranatural power. The πνεῦμα banishes the human νοῦς;, "mind." The pneumatics are of supraworldly nature and recognize each other … and can communicate with each other in the language of the spirit.[118]

Since the spiritual person's natural mind is "banished" by the spirit, s/he would take on a "supraworldly nature" so as to appear unfathomable and mystical to the worldly earthlings, which explains Paul's assertion that "he himself is by no one discerned." Similar to Conzelmann's transcendent description of the spiritual person's Inner Person, Garland speaks about God's revealed "heavenly truth that is naturally unknowable" and asks: "How can something that has no place in the human heart be made known? How do humans cross the divide between the world and God?" The answer lies in that "these can happen only through God's Spirit, who searches all things, even the depths of God. Human creatures do not have access to these things and do not even have the grammar or vocabulary for them until it is graciously bestowed by God's Spirit."[119]

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[117] Conzelmann, 65.

[118] Conzelmann, 65.

[119] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 98. Garland (1947–) is professor of New Testament at Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University.

As such, Paul's presupposition is that the believers have already received the Holy Spirit's outpouring and indwelling, and thus have the nature of their spirit sanctified. The sanctification of the spirit would then make them receptive to God's revelation. In this way, "spiritual persons are those Christians in whom the Spirit has really become the fundamental power of life."[120] Gärtner provides further support of this hypothesis with a sensible phrase: "like is known only by like."

> Consequently the sole being who is able to convey the revelation to man and open his mind to know it is God's *Pneuma* [Spirit], because he comes from God, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 12. God and his *Pneuma* are of the same quality (essence) and that is the reason why the *Pneuma* is able to 'search everything', πάντα ἐραυνᾷ, and πάντα is the depths of God, τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, v. 10. 'Like is known only by like' and therefore no one knows what 'belongs to God, τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, except the *Pneuma* of God', v. 11. … If a man wants to know God, to get a profound insight into God's wisdom, he must have a share in the same *Pneuma* in accordance with the principle 'like by like' … The *Pneuma* must be man's property, if he wants to be a σοφός [wise one].[121]

In the words of Gaffin, ὁ πνευματικὸς (the spiritual man) "is such because indwelt, renewed, enlightened, directed by the Holy Spirit. … [Spiritual persons] are granted the Spirit-worked capacity for appraisal and discernment so that, however imperfectly and even inadequately (13:12), they can truly understand God's revelation and know it for what it is. In other words, the believer is taken up into the "closed circle" of the Spirit's activity."[122] This "closed circle" of the Holy Spirit, together with Gärtner's "like is known only by like," betoken the transformation and sanctification of the Inner Person to bring it into the realm of God's

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[120] Garland, 99.

[121] Bertil E. Gärtner, "The Pauline and Johannine Idea of 'to Know God' against the Hellenistic Background," *New Testament Studies* 14, no. 2 (January 1968): 218, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500018622. Italics original. Gärtner (1924–2009) was a Swedish Lutheran bishop of Gothenburg (1970–1991) and professor of New Testament exegesis at Princeton Theological Seminary.

[122] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 57, no. 1 (1995): 114–15. Gaffin (1936–) was Charles Krahe Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA. Since 2008, he is Professor Emeritus, Biblical and Systematic Theology.

mystery, and out of the sphere of ὁ ψυχικὸς – the "soulish" person. The expected consequence is that ὁ πνευματικὸς becomes knowledgeable in all things [πάντα] spiritual. This term *πάντα* is prone to misunderstanding, but Gaffin has a penetrating and well-balanced insight:

> Paul's point is not that ὁ πνευματικὸς, by the Spirit, transcends every human limitation and so shares in God's exhaustive self-knowledge. Nor is he suggesting that believers have expert, encyclopedic knowledge in every area of human investigation – as if they know all there is to know about God, self, and the universe. … At the same time, however, we must not tone down this passage or domesticate Paul's πάντα. His point is hardly that revelation is restricted in its relevance to only a part of life, or following Kant, that it concerns only the moral-religious dimension of human experience. Rather, God's eschatological wisdom, focused in Christ's cross and resurrection, is still in view here … Such wisdom, Paul is saying, has a bearing on, in fact is essential for, a true knowledge of everything there is to know about God, ourselves, and the world.[123]

Thus, πάντα is neither God-like omniscience, nor just confined to the Kantian "noumenal" domain, but a view of the phenomenal and spiritual universe as sanctioned or tempered by divine reality. One could perhaps say that this is the Christian counterpart to what Buddhism terms "*bodhi*," or enlightenment – seeing reality as it is. In Conzelmann's vocabulary, it is called divine illumination.

The apostle Paul also has a self-description that should demonstrate such a state of being spiritual: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). At the time of the writing the epistle (traditionally deemed to be ca. AD 60-62, during his Roman imprisonment), Paul was in his last period of life (about five to seven years before his death during Nero's persecution, ca. AD 67).[124, 125] A prior epistle, Galatians (written ca. AD 48 to 57), indicates that

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[123] Gaffin, 115.

[124] Joseph H. Hellerman, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Philippians*, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 3. Hellerman (1952–) is Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Talbot School of Theology in California.

[125] Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2016). Porter (1956–) is a New Testament scholar; he was Professor of Theology and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Surrey Roehampton in London, and is now President, Dean, and Professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College in Ontario, Canada.

he had already reached a "selfless" spiritual realm of the vicarious living of Christ: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me …" (Galatians 2:20). At the time of writing Galatians, it was due to the death of his depraved outward person that Paul realized a complete substitution of the life of Christ in his Inner Person. A decade or more later, when writing the Philippians, he could proclaim that he and Christ are one – "to live is Christ." No doubt his spiritual progress has reached the pinnacle. Such bold and weighty statement announces to the world that his living *is* Christ, not just "resembles Christ," "imitates Christ," or "approximates Christ," but "*is* Christ Himself." What Christians in their right mind could or dare say such a thing? But for a spiritual overcomer such as the apostle Paul at this stage, even his most mundane, everyday life is nothing but a manifestation of Jesus Christ. Only such a spiritually mature person can discern all things, is qualified as a "steward of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1), and has "knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4 KJV, or "knowledge in the secret of the Christ" YLT), all because his Inner Person can function properly and is in complete union with Christ, who Himself is the ultimate mystery of God (Colossians 2:2: " … in a true knowledge of God's mystery, *that is*, Christ *Himself*" [NASB] or "unto the knowledge of the mystery of God – Christ" [Literal Emphasis Translation]).

The spiritual persons are also defined by the New Testament as "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). So, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews agrees with Paul that the ability to discern things (spiritual by implication) belongs to the spiritually mature. But Paul further indicates that such a person "is by no one discerned," which is a statement most probably in reference to the Inner Person, since the outward is plainly observable by others, and the soul's emotions, volitions and thoughts can also be probed to a certain extent. The Inner Person in the spirit, however, is deeply concealed. The

reason non-spiritual persons can be more easily discerned is presumably because they live not according to their Inner Person, but according to the outward person – the soul and the body. In contrast, for a spiritual person like the apostle Paul, the Inner Person is fully in control, which renders him quite a mystery to others. Modern disciplines of psychology or psycho-analysis attempt to uncover the workings of the human mind. But, however much they have discovered, they at most reach the arena of the soul – mind, emotion, and will, and as view from a trichotomistic point, they cannot even scratch the surface of the human spirit, not to mention that of the spiritual persons. What makes the Inner Person of the spiritual so mystical, so unfathomable? Part of the reason is because the Inner Person is the indwelling place of the Holy Spirit, imparting it a divine and mystical nature.

But, does it imply that the regenerate is always considered "spiritual" in Paul's terms delineated above? Far from it, because the Christian still lives in the flesh and is subject to the sways of sin in the inherent nature. To wit, the Corinthians were apparently among the most well-endowed Christians: "That in every thing ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift …" (1 Corinthians 1:5-7). However, Paul rebukes them harshly: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual (πνευματικοῖς), but as unto carnal (σαρκίνοις, fleshly), even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal (σαρκικοί): for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal (σαρκικοί), and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Therefore, being regenerate is not synonymous with being spiritual; the gap between them is quite wide.

Another related question would be: does the Inner Person in the non-Christian also have the ability to perceive God's mystery? Here "non-Christian" is a person not born again by the Holy Spirit, and not necessarily defined by "ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος," soul-dominated or natural person. Gaffin thinks that "the contrast between ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος and ὁ πνευματικὸς [is] a distinction that, without exception, covers every hearer."[126] But the addressees of the epistle is the Christians in Corinth, and if the spiritual is confined to those who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit inside, then accordingly, the ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος encompasses both Christians who are σαρκικός (carnal) and unbelievers. Does the New Testament really lumps all unbelievers as "soulish" and fleshly, and thus incapable of receiving God's mystery? The apostle Paul gives us a firm negative: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [all mankind]; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20). Evidently, Paul teaches that certain mysteries of God – His invisible things, eternal power, and Godhead (θειότης, divinity abstractly) – are plainly knowable. Paradoxically, the invisible is "seen," but certainly not by the physical eye, and very likely by the eye of the Inner Person. "The mind brightly beholding what the eye cannot discern," comment Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown. Furthermore, this universal revelation of God becomes the origin of faith in the believer:

> … the outward creation is not the *parent* but the *interpreter* of our faith in God. That faith has its primary sources within our own breast (v. 19); but it becomes *an intelligible and articulate conviction* only through what we observe around us ("by the things which are made," v. 20). And thus are the inner and the outer

[126] Gaffin, "Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16," 114.

> revelation of God the complement of each other, making up between them one universal and immovable conviction *that God is*.[127]

There is no special qualification, such as believing in Jesus Christ, to these stunning statements of the apostle. Thus such revelation is given the term *general revelation* to distinguish it from special revelation that results in one's faith in Jesus Christ. "That which is known of God excludes that which needed a *special revelation* to make it known, as in particular the contents of the Gospel; the former is derived from the *general revelation* of nature."[128] If we apply Gärtner's hypothesis of "like is known only by like," then this general perception from nature about God's mystery in all mankind, however faint, implies that there exists some type of divine, spiritual faculty in all of us, which I propose to call *the Inner Person* in this dissertation.

To conclude, both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person are mysteries in their own right. The former's mystic, ineffable characteristics are expressed in the *sūtras* as multifarious bewildering negations that confound the unenlightened mind. The latter's mystic nature is subtly insinuated in the New Testament as the knowledge of the mystery of the Creator: (1) for the "spiritual persons," a discerning spirituality which ultimately points to a perfect union with the resurrected Christ, rendering them indiscernible to others; (2) for the carnal and soul-dominated Christians, just enough truth related to the salvation of the Savior, and not much more; and (3) for the rest of mankind, God's invisible being (divinity) and acts (power) as displayed in nature.

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[127] Robert Jamieson, Andrew Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary: Critical, Practical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1, *Matthew-Corinthians* (Toledo, OH: Jerome B. Names, 1883), 599. Italics original.

[128] Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistles to the Romans*, rev. and ed. William P. Dickson, trans. John C. Moore and Edwin Johnson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 57. Italics original.

## The Sovereign

When it comes to sovereignty, the MPNS is unambiguous about it. The *sūtra* ascribes "the Great Self" to this important attribute of the *Tathāgatagarbha*:

> 善男子！如世間人,以多因緣之所得者,則名為大。涅槃亦爾,以多因緣之所得故,故名為大。云何復名為大涅槃？有大我故,名大涅槃。涅槃無我,大自在故,名為大我。云何名為大自在耶？有八自在,則名為我。(T12n0374_p0502c12-17).
>
> (Translation) Oh, good man, for the secular people, what is obtained through multitudinous causes and conditions (*hetu-pratyaya*) are called great.[129] The same is true with *nirvāna* – because it is attained through myriads of causes and conditions, it is said to be great. Why is it called *mahānirvāna*? Because the Great Self exists, it is called *mahānirvāna*. *Nirvāna* is nonself, because it possesses great sovereignty; it is called the Great Self. Why is it named, the Great Sovereignty? Because it possesses eight types of sovereignty, thus it is called self.
>
> 如來遍滿一切諸處，猶如虛空。虛空之性不可得見,如來亦爾實不可見,以自在故令一切見,如是自在名為大我,如是大我名大涅槃,以是義故名大涅槃。(T12n0374_p0503a19-22).
>
> (Translation) The Tathāgata permeates all spaces, just as emptiness. The nature of emptiness is invisible; even so, the Tathāgata is also truly invisible. Due to its sovereignty (*aiśvarya*), it makes itself manifest to all. Such sovereignty is call "the Great Self," and such Great Self is named *mahānirvāna*; because of this significance it is named *mahānirvāna*.

The word *aiśvarya (sovereignty, 自在 zì zài)*, has this definition: "referring to the 'self-mastery' or 'autonomy' that is a product of religious training and/or related superknowledges (*abhijñā*) that are gained thereby, such as clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, the ability to manifest transformation bodies, and erudition."[130] If we take the sovereignty to be related to "superknowledges," that will make the Tathāgata omniscient, which fact is affirmed in another

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[129] 因緣 (*yīn yuán*, *hetu-pratyaya*, causes and conditions): "Basic Meaning: cause(s) and condition(s). Senses: In the most basic sense, the character 因 refers to a main cause (Skt. *hetu*), which directly incurs a result, while 緣 refers to an indirect cause (Skt. *pratyaya*), which helps or participates in producing the result. " Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "因緣" [Cause(s) and condition(s)], by Charles Muller, last modified October 23, 2017, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?56.xml+id(%27b56e0-7de3%27).

[130] Buswell and Lopez, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. "Aiśvarya."

passage, where the Buddha is discoursing on the topic of "the very profound treasure of the Buddha-Tathāgatas " (諸佛如來甚深奧藏 T12n0374_p0503a24), a.k.a. *Tathāgatagarbha*:

> 一切知故，名為大樂。非一切知不名大樂;諸佛如來一切知故名為大樂。以大樂故,名大涅槃。(T12n0374_p0503b12-14).
>
> (Translation) Due to all-knowing, [the treasure] is called the Great Bliss. If not all-knowing, it would not be called the Great Bliss. All Buddha-Tathāgatas are all-knowing; thus they are called the Great Bliss. Since [it is] the Great Bliss, it is called *Mahānirvāna*.

Combining the last two passages, we arrive at the omnipresence ("permeates all spaces") and omniscience ("all-knowing") of the *Tathāgatagarbha*. These two attributes, however different, also belong to the Judeo-Christian God. His omniscience is everywhere demonstrated in the Bible. An instance is Jesus' admonition: "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30). And also, "… all the churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts …" (Revelation 2:23b). Likewise with God's omnipresence, we hear the prophet spoke the oracle of God: "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:23-24). And this all-pervasiveness pertains to Jesus Christ as well: "… Christ is all, and in all" (Colossians 3:11b). As for God's sovereignty, the entire Old and New Testaments abound with sayings such as: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Ephesians 1:11).

We are all too familiar with these attributions to God and Jesus Christ; but, what about the Inner Person? Christians, while still in the body, are limited by their corporeality so that omniscience and omnipresence are out of their reach. But there is some evidence of a precursor of their resemblance to the firstborn Brother (cf. Romans 8:29) even in this earthly flesh, as

quoted earlier that "the spiritual (ὁ πνευματικὸς), doth discern indeed (ἀνακρίνει μὲν) all things, and he himself is by no one discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:15, Young's Literal Translation). The natural, "soulish" person, being unaware of and insensitive to the Inner Person within, cannot understand the things relating to the Holy Spirit (v.14), because s/he is completely dominated by the soul and the Inner Person is concealed. Only "the spiritual (ὁ πνευματικὸς)" has the restored and purged "faculty" – the Inner Person – to discern such things. In this sense of epistemological prowess, the spiritual person would be the Christian counterpart to the awakened Buddhist who sees the *Tathāgatagarbha* within as the Great Self.

The other aspect, omnipresence, can be attributed to the resurrected Christ: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Even more evident would be Jesus' own teaching about Himself and God indwelling the believers: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. … Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:20-23). Secondly, about the future glory of the saints, as the apostle Paul inquires: "… How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" (1 Corinthians 15:35), but he answers this question directly in another epistle: "[Christ] shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body …" (Philippians 3:21a). This is also confirmed by the apostle John: "… we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). But are both apostles talking about a "spiritual body" without flesh and blood? The answer would be negative, since the resurrected Jesus replies to this question Himself: "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have" (Luke 24:39). Based on the above argumentation, we may conclude that the

Christian saint in the new heaven and new earth shall take on a glorious physical body like that of the resurrected Jesus Christ, with no spatial limitations. At that time, the Inner Person will reign sovereign within the person, while in perfect union as a bride with the Bride Groom. In this sense, the entire purpose of God's creation of the Inner Person will then be completely fulfilled. However, having no spatial limitation is nowhere near omnipresence.

As for sovereignty, the apostle Paul indicates that each person has an internal master who is in charge: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master (κύριος) he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God (θεός or the Lord, κύριος) is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). Furthermore, the apostle declares his liberty and sovereignty: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12). As if that is not enough, he proclaimed a second time in the same epistle: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Corinthians 10:23). Regarding Christian liberty, Martin Luther wrote a book of the same title, in which he famously said, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone," which is actually a derivation from Paul:[131] "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (1 Corinthians 9:19). Paul could declare such freedom perhaps because he realizes the sovereignty of the Inner Person. He could oblige himself as servant to everyone, perhaps because his Inner Person could exercise the liberty and sovereignty in Christ.

In summary, the Tathāgata is called sovereign because He is the unrestricted Great Self, comparable to emptiness that permeates all spaces; knowing all things, He is also the Great Bliss

[131] Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, trans. A. C. Buchheim (Philadelphia: Lutheran, 1903), 6.

and the Great Nirvāna. For Christianity, all three Persons of the Godhead possess the perfections of omnipresence and omniscience. The "spiritual" Christian saints, with their Inner Person awakened and transformed, get to foretaste the ability to discern or judge all things while on earth, and will receive a glorified new body like that of the resurrected Christ.

## The Dominant

Another topic closely associated with sovereignty is dominion. Whereas the former emphasizes independence and its concomitant properties of omniscience or omnipresence, the latter stresses more the sense of governing and ruling. In this respect, the *Tathāgatagarbha* also is called "the lord" in the MPNS:

> 凡夫愚人所計我者,或言大如拇指、或如芥子、或如微塵;如來說我悉不如是,是故說言,諸法無我,實非無我。何者是我？若法是實、是真、是常、是主、是依、性不變易者,是名為我。如彼大醫善解乳藥,如來亦爾,為眾生故,說諸法中真實有我。(T12n0374_p0378c27-0379a04).
>
> (Translation) What commoners and foolish people entertain about the self, that it is either as a thumb, or as a mustard seed, or as a minuscule dust, the Tathāgata considers not the self. Therefore he says that there is no self in all dharmas; but in reality it is not that self does not exist. What is the self? If the dharma is real, true, permanent, the lord (*svāmi-bhūta* or *adhipateyā*), the basis, with a nature that is immutable, then it is called the self.[132] Just as a great physician who understands well the milk medicine, so is the Tathāgata, who, for the sake of the sentient beings, speak of the real existence of the self in all dharmas.

In another place, the Buddha illustrates the difference between *nirvāna* and *mahānirvāna*, pivoting on the point of seeing the Buddha Nature. After several iterations of comparisons, eventually the Buddha Nature is crowned as the Sacred King, Dharma Lord, and the Great Nirvāna:

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[132] 主 (*zhǔ*, *svāmi-bhūta* or *adhipateyā*, lord): "Basic Meaning: be the lord. Senses: Be the main; the most important (Skt. *svāmi-bhūta*, *adhipateyā*)." Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. “爲主” [Be the lord], by Charles Muller, last modified August 22, 2007, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?72.xml+id(%27b7232-4e3b%27).

> 聲聞緣覺至十住菩薩不見佛性，名為涅槃，非大涅槃。若能了了見於佛性，則得名為大涅槃也。… 復次善男子！隨有小王之所住處,名為小城,轉輪聖王所住之處乃名大城。聲聞、緣覺,八萬、六萬、四萬、二萬、一萬住處,名為涅槃。無上法主、聖王住處,乃得名為大般涅槃,以是故名大般涅槃。(T12n0374_p0502b19-c01).
>
> (Translation) Voice-hearers (*śrāvakas*), solitary realizers (*pratyekabuddhas*), and up to even bodhisattvas living in the tenth ground do not see the Buddha Nature.[133] They [their realms] are called *nirvāna*, but not *mahānirvāna*. Only when they can perfectly clearly see the Buddha Nature will they [their realms] be called *mahānirvāna*. … Again, good man, the dwelling place of a lesser king is called a small city; the dwelling place of the Wheel-Revolving Sacred King (*Cakravartī-Rāja*) is called the great city.[134] The dwelling places of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, numbering eighty thousand, sixty thousand, forty thousand, twenty thousand, and ten thousand, are called *nirvāna*. The dwelling place of the supreme Dharma Lord (*śastra-kāra*), the Sacred King, thus is named *Mahāparinirvāṇa*.[135] This is the reason it is named *Mahāparinirvāṇa*.

Though only metaphors, all these majestic titles conferred upon the Buddha Nature bespeak the implication that the *Tathāgatagarbha* is the true sovereign ruler within a person. In another *sūtra*, the assertion is made that, consciousness permeates and governs the entire body. By deduction, the *Tathāgatagarbha*, as the highest and deepest consciousness, would reign the entire body.

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[133] 緣覺 (*a*, *pratyekabuddhas*, solitary realizer): "Basic Meaning: enlightened by contemplation on dependent arising. Senses: A Chinese translation, according to one interpretation of the meaning of the term pratyekabuddha. See under the transliterated form of 辟支佛; also translated into Chinese as 'solitary realizer' 獨覺 (Skt. *pratyaya-buddha*)" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "緣覺" [Enlightened by contemplation on dependent arising], by Charles Muller, last modified October 30, 2013, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?7d.xml+id(%27b7de3-89ba%27).

[134] 轉輪聖王 (*a*, *Cakravartī-Rāja*, Wheel-Revolving Sacred King): "Basic Meaning: wheel-turning sage king. Senses: In pre-Buddhist Indian tradition, this refers to a sagely, benevolent, just, and capable ruler, who eminently handles the domain; somewhat of an ideal, mythical vision of the perfect king, who is able to rule by righteousness rather than by force (*cakravartī-rāja*). In Buddhism, a special meaning is implied, with this ruler possessing a buddha's enlightenment and abilities. " Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "轉輪聖王" [Wheel-turning sage king], by Charles Muller, last modified September 9, 2010, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?8f.xml+id(%27b8f49-8f2a-8056-738b%27).

[135] 法主 (*a*, *śastra-kāra*, Dharma Lord): "Basic Meaning: king of the Dharma. Senses: The Dharma-lord, Buddha (Skt. *śastra-kāra*, *śastra-kṛt*, *dharma-svāmin*). " Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "法主" [King of the dharma], by Charles Muller, last modified June 27, 2009, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?6c.xml+id(%27b6cd5-4e3b%27).

> 其受想行識，此四名無色陰，受謂領受苦樂等相及不苦不樂之相,想謂知苦樂相,行謂現念作意及觸,識者是身之主,遍行諸體,身有所為莫不由識。(T12n0347_p0186a08-11 《大乘顯識經 *Mahāyāna Sūtra of Consciousness Revealed*》).

> Sensory reception, perception, mental processing, and consciousness are called the four formless aggregates. Sensory reception leads to experiencing pain, pleasure, or neither of the two. Perception refers to cognition of pain or pleasure. Mental processing refers to thinking, attention, and sensory contact. Consciousness is the lord of the body, pervading the entire body and directing all of its activities.[136]

In comparison, there is also such a concept in the Bible as the Inner Person being the lord of the Christian. In our Christianity chapter, we have quoted the apostle Paul from the Epistle to the Romans as prohibiting judgment among Christians. The entire message is below:

> "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master (τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ) he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God (or the lord, ὁ κύριος) is able to make him stand.[137] One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks" (Romans 14:1-6).

As an alternative reading from most commentaries, we have derived that Paul could be teaching that the decision to determine the cleanliness of foods "is to be decided by each individual's internal master, probably referring to the Inner Person" If this is the case, then the judgment "is a matter of personal, internal guidance, and, if our assumption holds, is properly assigned to the Inner Person. In this case, other people should not attempt to play a part in it, and each person is responsible to sense what the Inner Person guides him/her to do." (Ch. 2,

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[136] Rulu, *Teachings of the Buddha* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012), 148.

[137] Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Hort, *The Greek New Testament Westcott-Hort (with Accents)*, TheWord ed., 1881.

subsection "Master"). In other words, in matters of personal preference (i.e., not morally related), where no decision is absolutely "wrong," God leaves the prerogative of choice to the Inner Person. The only caveat is: "… Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (v.5b); such teaching is reaffirmed by the elder, James: "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). Notice that Paul does indicate those who abide by Moses' Law (excluding those who have other reasons to avoid animal products) to be "weak," implying that it is an inferior lifestyle choice. Why does Paul make such "judgment" himself, when he teaches the Christians not to judge? From the perspective of the Inner Person, it is those who regard all things edible and all days equal that are strong in spiritual strength, because they are liberated from the confinement of the Judaic/Mosaic Law, which requires inhibition of food and observation of festivals. Only such a freed person can be truly "fully persuaded in his own mind," because s/he is certain about the liberty in Christ – "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. … If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:32, 36).

The apostle Paul seems to show the certainty in his Inner Person about the gospel he preaches that he is called by the Jews as he "who [has] turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6), and, sure enough, when he sees the apostle Peter waver before the Jews who uphold circumcision, he does not hesitate to rebuke Peter (Galatians 2:11-14). But the ultimate display of the maturity and steadfastness of Paul's Inner Person would be when he is on the way to Jerusalem and faces the entreaty of fellow Christians "… who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4). What Christians in their right mind would refuse such request, knowing that the words are spoken "through the Spirit"? But Paul decisively refuses to follow their advice. What emboldens the apostle to take such unimaginable action, even against the advice of a spiritual prophet? Could it be his Inner Person that bolsters his

uncompromising stance? If so, then what we observe from the apostle Paul is a perfect example of the Inner Person taking charge of the entire person and guiding him through the perilous course of his entire preaching career.

On the other hand, however lofty the position of the *Tathāgatagarbha* or Inner Person is, for the commoners, the pitiful reality is that the *Tathāgatagarbha* or Inner Person is either dormant or imprisoned by the second-in-command, which, in the Buddhist case, is the seventh consciousness, and in the Christian case would be the outer person, or the soul. In the Buddhist chapter, we very briefly introduced the Yogācāra psychology as composing of the five physical senses, the rational consciousness, the subconscious called *kliṣṭamanas* ("afflicted mentality" 染末那/末那識 *rǎn muò nà/muò nà shì*), and the store-consciousness, *Ālaya-vijñāna*. This system was adopted in East Asian Buddhism, along with the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, resulting in their syncretism that the eighth consciousness becomes synonymously termed both *Ālaya-vijñāna* and *Tathāgatagarbha*. For the unawakened soul, this eighth consciousness is so deeply concealed by adventitious defilements since beginningless time that its proper functions as a governor and ruler of the self are insignificant and imperceptible. Therefore, the second-in-line to the throne usurps this authority and crowns itself as king:

> *Kliṣṭamanas* is the name given to the many types of afflictive emotions (*kleśas*), stored as *bījas* (seeds) in the *ālayavijñāna*. They are projected in the form of related *saṃskāras* [links of karmic predispositions 行支 *xíng zhī*] when the personal-I is focused upon an object of desire.[138] When these emotional *saṃskāras* surface they immediately fuse with the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), to produce such things as desire-mind, self-will, (i.e., the four types of 'afflictive emotions') or forms of ego-clinging. The emotions always manifest in relation to a concept of 'self', executing the will to appropriate things

[138] 行支 (*xíng zhī*, *saṃskāras*, links of karmic predispositions): Digital Dictionary of Buddhism: "行支" [Link of karmic predispositions] by Charles Muller, last modified April 9, 2011, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?88.xml+id(%27b884c-652f%27).

> desired. They thus produce attachments for all things deemed pleasurable, glamorous, or needy by the personality, and react to that which they dislike.[139]

To restore the original order, in which the *Tathāgatagarbha* reigns supreme, the only way would be to eliminate all the adventitious defilements so as to let the *Tathāgatagarbha* shine through. This result is accomplished through one's awakening (*avabodha* or *prativedha* 覺悟 *jué xù*, Jpn. *satori*) to one's true nature, followed by self-cultivation.[140] As for the restoration of the Inner Person, the apostle Paul also realizes the pain of the usurpation by the illegitimate heir (Romans 7:23-24). He does not despair, though, because he immediately proclaims the salvation of God through Jesus Christ (v. 25). It turns out well with Paul because he has found the Inner Person and realized that his only hope is His grace and salvation. Following Paul's footstep, for the Christian, the first priority is to discover the Inner Person, and then to depend on Christ to redeem it and restore its rightful, sovereign position to reign within the personal universe. The restoration of this position would then empower the Christian to be constantly in communion with the Lord of the great cosmos, which allows the personal universe to be managed according to the divinely ordained order. Such restoration comes from the renewing and strengthening of the Inner Person by God's grace (2 Corinthians 4:16, Ephesians 3:16), resulting in "… the peace of Christ (ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ) presid[ing] (βραβευέτω) in your hearts …" (Colossians 3:15 Darby). The verb, βραβεύω (Darby: to preside. KJV: to rule), is a *hapax legomenon* (a term occurring just once) in the New Testament, and is defined by Strong as: "to arbitrate, i.e. (gen.)

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[139] Bodo Balsys, *A Treatise on Mind*, vol. 1, *The "Self" or 'Non-self' in Buddhism* (Leura, Australia: Universal Dharma, 2016), 166–67. Balsys (1949–) is the founder of The School of Esoteric Sciences and writes on subjects of Buddhism and the Esoteric Sciences,

[140] 覺悟 (*jué wù*, *avabodha* or *prativedha* , awakening): "Basic Meaning: to awaken. Senses: Understanding, comprehension; (Skt. *avabodha, prativedha*)" Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, s.v. "覺悟" [To awaken], by Charles Muller, last modified May 11, 2008, http://buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?89.xml+id(%27b89ba-609f%27).

to govern (fig. prevail): - rule."[141] Elsewhere, it is said to "[express] the underlying sense of 'having the role of greatest influence.'"[142] Moo indicates that the word

> translates a Greek verb that refers to the activity of the "umpire," who renders verdicts in contested situations. The verb thus naturally takes on the connotation of "control"; the standard Greek lexicon paraphrases, let the peace of Christ "be the decisive factor." In general, then, Paul wants the Colossians to make "peace" the arbiter, the factor that should be given preference over competing concerns and interests.[143]

It would seem that "the connotation of 'control'" is not the main intended meaning, since an umpire only renders verdicts in contention, but does not otherwise strictly control the decision making process. Thus, the KJV translation of "to rule" is taken from the "govern" part of the definition. But if that is the case, the verb should be in the genitive case, which it is not (being: present, active, imperative, third person, singular). Therefore, the meaning is closer to "having greatest influence," and "to arbitrate" than to "ruling/governing." This permits us to surmise that Christ's peace does not come into the heart to dominate, but to assist and guide the Inner Person's decision making and proper functioning, and to give testimony of the Inner Person's legitimate status as the personal ruler.

Summing up the above, we may say that in both East Asian Buddhism and Christianity, the ultimate objective of living a higher, meaningful life of liberty and purpose would be to find the deepest part of the self, the *Tathāgatagarbha* or the Inner Person, and to restore its pristine status as the personal King. For the Buddhist, it is the opening of the inner eye to see the true self nature or Buddha Nature, and then self-cultivate accordingly. For the Christian, the strengthening

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[141] James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament: With Their Renderings in the* Authorized English Version (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1890), s.v. "1018. βραβεύω."

[142] Stephen D. Renn, ed., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words: Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), s.v. "Breabeuo [βραβεύω, 1018]".

[143] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 283. Moo (1950–) is a Reformed New Testament scholar and Blanchard Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College Graduate School.

and recovering of the Inner Person to its rightful position depends on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and the surrendering of self-will to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

## *Chapter Conclusion*

In approaching this comparison chapter, we very cautiously remind ourselves and the reader that any parallel found between the two traditions cannot, and should not, be carried out heedlessly, as to draw any premature conclusion that such particular similarity can be considered equivalent on both sides, since each of them involves a widely distinct developmental path, which is much too complicated for any intellectual analysis to achieve a complete and impartial understanding. Our objective is only to enlighten the obscure Biblical concept of the Inner Person, while promoting mutual understanding and encouraging further dialogue between the two sides, through the vehicle of the *Tathāgatagarbha* within the Buddhist *sūtras*.

To set the framework for a comparative study, this chapter begins by sorting out the divergences that exist between Buddhism and Christianity in general. Early Indian Buddhism, known as Nikāyas, is atheistic, and therefore autosoteriological, which forms a vivid contrast with the heterosoteriology of Christianity. The former also denies the existence of the self (*ātmán*), or in effect, the Inner Person, deeming it as empty (*śūnya*).

With the advent of the Yogācāra school and their introduction of the concept of *āśraya parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis, or of the defiled *ālaya-vijñāna* into the pure *amala-vijñāna*), Buddhism is brought a step closer to Christianity in regard to the self, in that the latter has a doctrine of rebirth (a new life divinely imparted in lieu of transformation of the old life). However, many disparities still exist between the two traditions: (1) the timeless nature of the defiled *ālaya-vijñāna* as opposed to the sinful nature that began with Adam and Eve; (2) moral

neutrality of the former versus total corruption of the latter; (3) the mode of salvation – transformation of the basis by self-effort in contrast with redemption by Jesus Christ; (4) the Yogācāra concept of "saint" entailing suprahuman powers whereas the Christian saint is a redeemed ordinary person, often lowly and persecuted, who is separated unto God; (5) the Yogācāra self follows the Nāgārjuna tradition of being empty, but the Pauline Inner Person is a true self that will mature into a dominating lord within the Christian.

Came Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the above impasse drastically turned amicable, because now deism, along with heterosoteriology, is a distinct possibility. With certain Mahāyāna schools, Sakyamuni became just one of the manifestation of the Mahāyāna God, who came to save the world, and not just to obtain personal liberation. Like the Christian counterpart, the Mahāyāna God also possesses omniscience, a striking departure from the Nikāya conception of the Buddha, in which His knowledge does not go beyond the basic Buddhist truths. Thus the transcendence of the Mahāyāna "Deity" in East Asian Buddhism constitutes a fundamental agreement with Christianity, which paves the foundation for this comparative study.

The parallels between the two traditions are researched and analyzed in this chapter under nine categories, with the majority of Buddhist scriptures coming from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, or *Nirvāna Sūtra* for short:

10. Divinity – The main scripture used for Buddhism is a passage in *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* 寶藏論 (*Treatise of the Treasure*), which equates Truth with 神 *Shén* (commonly translated as "God"). Since the ultimate Truth in Buddhism is the Tathāgata Himself, the treatise effectively elevates the status of *Tathāgatagarbha* to *Shén*. The many attributes that this passage ascribes to this Mahāyāna divinity include: the Truth, the Way/*Dào*, the bodily Incarnation, creativity, eternality, immortality, transcendence, and immutability, among

others. By implication, since the Inner Person inherits its life from the Creator, and since both Testaments actually confers the title, gods, to His children, it is deduced that the Inner Person also has certain divine attributes.

11. Eternity – The *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* passage also asserts that "the Truth … abides forever, is unborn, and does not age." Similarly, in the *Nirvāna Sūtra* we read that the Tathāgata body is eternally abiding, imperishable, and adamantine. In Christianity, the "blueprint" of mankind existed before the foundation of the world, but the physical body and the Inner Person have a definite starting point at the creation of Adam. Their eternity lies in the future, when the present world is concluded.
12. Purity – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* contains a great number of passages about the purity of the *Tathāgatagarbha*. Additionally, the legacy of the Sixth Patriarch of Chán illustrates the importance of the realization of the original purity of Buddha Nature. As for the Inner Person, there is no doubt that it was originally pure when YHWH breathed it into Adam. But the postlapsarian (lit. "after the fall") Inner Person becomes stained with sins, much like the *Tathāgatagarbha* is covered by adventitious defilements. Redemption of the former requires the blood of Jesus Christ, the shedding off of the old person and the "putting on" of His salvation; liberation of the latter calls for the process of awakening along with cultivation, to be purged of the impurities and restored to their pristine condition.
13. True Self – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* tells us in no ambivalent terms that the true self is *Tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha Nature, and it exists in all sentient beings originally without distinction. From the Christian perspective, all human beings, whether Christian or not, should possess the Inner Person, because YHWH's breath of life is bestowed upon the first ancestor of all mankind. On the other hand, the Buddha also speaks of no-self, as a way to

refute the deluded self perceived by the commoner as true self. The Christian match to the false self would be the outer person, which represents the body of sin, darkness, corruption, and death. For liberation and salvation, the false/corrupt self must be negated so that the true self can shine forth.

14. Immutability – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* attributes this property to the Tathāgata, *Tathāgatagarbha*, and Buddha Nature interchangeably. In comparison, the Inner Person of Christianity could also be said to possess immutability, because (1) both apostles Paul and Peter affirm that it is imperishable, and (2) it derives immutability from Jesus Christ and God the Father, since it also inherits divinity from Them. In addition, other related attributes are also found to be parallel in both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, such as bliss, transcendence, and passivity.
15. Hiddenness – Because the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person are so precious to one's liberation or salvation, they are well hidden as a jewel. The terminology used by the *Nirvāna Sūtra* is full of secret significances, and the Bible often alludes to the secrecy of God, Christ, and truths. The secrecy of Jesus Christ especially comes in a paradoxical character, hidden to those hardened-minded, but revealed to the meek and humble. The Buddha similarly teaches a bifurcated methodology (two-truths) of dissemination of the Dharma, for either the commoner or the enlightened. Therefore, both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person are well hidden and, it seems, revealed only to those whose destiny has been ordained to the loftier realm.
16. Mystery – Closely related to hiddenness is the attribute of mystery, because most often than not, providentially hidden things can be categorized as mystery. In this respect, the *Nirvāna Sūtra* uses apophatic language to address the *Tathāgatagarbha* body and the Buddha Nature.

In comparison, mystery in Christianity takes the form of the paradoxical nature of God, such as Light dwelling in Darkness, and "the night shines as the day." The Inner Person is also part of the divine mystery, since it may "discern all things," but "is by no one discerned" in the case of a "spiritual" person. In the apostle Paul's terms, such a person would be one whose life is completely abandoned unto Jesus Christ, so that the latter takes over the entire Inner Person and outward person, resulting in "to live is Christ." Thus, the Inner Person assumes the mystical nature of the Son of God, Who is God's ultimate mystery in the whole cosmos. For the carnal Christians, their knowledge of God's mystery terminates at the point of personal salvation. For the rest of human race, God's being and acts unmistakably exhibit in nature.

17. Sovereignty – This property comes from the Sanskrit word *aiśvarya (sovereignty, 自在 zì zài)*, which appears in many places in the *Nirvāna Sūtra* to describe the Tathāgata or Buddha Nature. The implication of this word, other than "autonomy," is "superknowledges." Combined with the description of the Tathāgata as emptiness permeating all spaces, these two attributes correspond well to the omniscience and omnipresence of YHWH, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in Christianity. The omniscience of the Inner Person is somewhat foreshadowed in the apostle Paul, with such description as being able to "discern all things." Then, in the Eschaton, say the apostle Paul and the apostle John, the saints will be transformed into bodies resembling that of the resurrected Jesus, without spatial limitations (but not omnipresent). And the sovereignty of the Inner Person can be seen from the apostle Paul, as he claimed his Christian liberty: "All things are lawful for me" and "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all …."

18. Dominion – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* refers to the self as a lord, and to Buddha Nature as the dwelling place of the Sacred King, Dharma Lord, the Great Nirvāna. Since the *Tathāgatagarbha* is the true self, these great titles befit it as the governor and ruler of the whole person. In the *Mahāyāna Sūtra of Consciousness Revealed*, it is also said that consciousness is the lord of the body, conducting all of its behaviors. So, the *Tathāgatagarbha*, being the highest, Eighth Consciousness, is the king of the body. Comparatively, we can read Paul's Romans chapter fourteen as teaching that the decision-making process is assigned to the Inner Person. But for most ordinary people, such is not the case, due to the illegitimate usurpation of the throne by the seventh consciousness, in the Buddhist case, and the outward person, in the Christian case. Certainly this usurpation has its severe consequences – the loss of spiritual integrity and proper functioning of the person as a whole. It is therefore of utmost importance to restore the reign of the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person.

In proper comparative analysis, one should not hastily deduce any conclusion about the compatibility of two concepts drawn from different traditions, since they each have widely different cultural, social, religious, and historical backgrounds, among other factors. This comparativist chapter, therefore, does not aim to equate the Christian Inner Person with the Buddhist *Tathagatagarbha*. However, the important concept of the "Womb/embryo of the Thus Come/Gone One" in East Asian Buddhism, albeit controversial in the larger Buddhist circle, could undoubtedly enlighten Christians on the elusive expressions about the Inner Person in the New Testament. The Buddhist theory of Buddha Nature or *Tathagatagarbha* has the potential to greatly expand the Christian horizon of understanding of the God-given treasure inside every human being. Such knowledge would help to transform the practice of spiritual development into

a much more realistic pursuit – while still in the flesh of sin and defilements, discovering the Inner Person inside, and, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, cultivating it to restore its proper, divine function and purpose. The practical, cultivation part is another vast subject that can very well become the sequel to this dissertation.

# CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

This dissertation started out as the author's curiosity to find enlightenment through comparative inter-religious study on the obscure Inner Person of the New Testament – three occurrences in Pauline epistles and one in Petrine. The postulate here is that there exist enough resemblances between the Christian Inner Person and the Buddhist *Tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha Nature, since they both point to the inner-most part of our being, to warrant this study. One obvious advantage of choosing Buddhism as the subject of comparison is that, unlike the scarcity of references to the Inner Person in the New Testament, *Tathāgatagarbha* is a set doctrine in the Buddhism realm, with abundant primary sources and secondary commentaries for exploration, making this entire project feasible and potentially fruitful.

Given this overarching theme, we need to proceed with caution, as in any comparative work, so as not to conflate the two traditions and create any undesirable and untenable syncretism. Each tradition has its own rich and diverse social, historical, cultural backgrounds that it is quite impossible to make any implications of direct equivalence between the two religious systems, however the terms may sound alike. Therefore, the purpose of this project is only to raise the awareness of Christians seeking inward communion with their Savior and Lord, that there exists certain faint correspondence between their Inner Person and the Buddhist *Tathāgatagarbha*, which surprisingly comes from a very distant, even atheistic milieu. Such inter-religious and inter-cultural consciousness may help the serious-minded Christian (or Buddhists, for that matter) to better cultivate their inner spirituality, although this practical arena is beyond the scope of this dissertation. From a Biblical point of view, as justification for resorting to inter-religious study for enlightenment, there are many internal examples within both

Testaments themselves that incorporate "pagan" sources while treating them as truths. Thus, there should be little risk of offense to even the most devout fundamentalist of Christians.

## *Buddhism Presuppositions*

On the Buddhist side, the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine is largely concentrated in the so-called *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtras*, both of Indian origin in Sanskrit and of Chinese translation and/or re-composition. For this study, the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (MMPNS) is selected as our major focus because of the following reasons: (1) it is one of "the four most important early *tathāgatagarbha sūtras*" originally composed in India;[1] (2) it represents a turning point in Chinese Buddha Nature philosophy by linking the term *tathāgatagarbha* with *buddhadhātu* (translated as 佛性 *fuó xìng*, Buddha Nature); (3) it emphasizes the eternity of *Tathāgatagarbha*, which indirectly refutes the concept of "*nirvāna* as extinction"; and (4) "it tends to be rather unsystematic and seems to speak with many voices" which fact provides us a plethora of possible comparativist materials and advantages.[2]

The analytical method we adopt to use the Buddhist *sūtras* is to select passages that seem to correspond particularly well to Christian concepts, without justifying their overall doctrinal integrity in the Buddhist system of philosophy as a whole, or in any particular Buddhist school, since doing so would be too complex a task to fit in our project. Certain sections that are selected for use here may be negated or in conflict with other parts, either in the same or in different *sūtras*; the resolution of such incongruity is not attempted in this dissertation, because, again, that endeavor belongs to the scope of an altogether different research topic. In other words,

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[1] King, *Buddha Nature*, 12.

[2] King, 14.

Buddhist scriptural usage is employed on an *ad hoc* basis. Such usage should not be considered invalid because the scriptural sources are well-received and the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha* firmly established in Mahāyāna Buddhism for multiple centuries.

## *Christianity Presuppositions*

On the Christianity side, available resources used are the likes of Christian biographies of historical saints, reputable authors' writings, Biblical commentaries and lexicons, and the Christian Bible itself as supporting materials. As for the use of Biblical support, an important principle underlying the entire dissertation is that the treatment of Biblical passages here conforms predominantly to the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, which consists of four foundational convictions: "authority, necessity, sufficiency, and perspicuity."[3]

### Sufficiency or Perfection of the Scripture

Of these attributes, sufficiency is also termed "perfection" and after the Reformation era is then developed into the doctrine of "Biblical infallibility" or "inerrancy" in Protestantism, the formation of which "can be traced to the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century."[4] In a parallel move, in Roman Catholicism, pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of 1893 virtually paraphrase the same inerrancy concept:

> For all the books which the Church receives as sacred and canonical, are written wholly and entirely, with all their parts, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost; and … that inspiration not only is essentially incompatible with error, but excludes and rejects it as absolutely and necessarily as it is impossible that God Himself, the

[3] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:449.

[4] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 121. McGrath (1953–) is Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford.

> supreme Truth, can utter that which is not true. This is the ancient and unchanging faith of the Church ….[5]

This encyclical was later affirmed by another one from Pope Pius XII:

> In our own time the Vatican Council, … declared that these same books were to be regarded by the Church as sacred and canonical "… because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author, and as such were handed down to the Church herself." When, subsequently, some Catholic writers, in spite of this solemn definition of Catholic doctrine, by which such divine authority is claimed for the "entire books with all their parts" as to secure freedom from any error whatsoever, ventured to restrict the truth of Sacred Scripture solely to matters of faith and morals, … Our Predecessor of immortal memory, Leo XIII in the Encyclical Letter *Providentissimus Deus*, … justly and rightly condemned these errors [of restricting the truth of Scripture to only matters of faith and morals] and safe-guarded the studies of the Divine Books by most wise precepts and rules.[6]

These Protestant and Catholic declarations of inerrancy or infallibility of the Bible are a necessary result of its own attestation to its perfection and purity, for example, in Psalm 12:6, 19:7, and Proverbs 30:5. Such conviction can thus be considered a mainline thought in Christianity. In this dissertation, the Christian portion will carry this underlying principle.

## Perspicuity of the Scripture

Unlike the perfection or inerrant doctrine that received wider support of both Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, the perspicuity of the Scripture is a doctrine that the Reformation specifically formulated to refute the latter's claim of authority in interpretation:

> According to Rome, Scripture is unclear … Also, in the things that pertain to faith and life, it is not so clear that it can dispense with interpretation. It deals, after all, with the deepest mysteries, with God, the Trinity, the incarnation, predestination, and other truths. Even in its moral precepts … it is often so obscure that

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[5] Pope Leo XIII, "Providentissimus Deus: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Study of Holy Scripture," November 18, 1893, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_18111893_providentissimus-deus.html.

[6] Pope Pius XII, "Divino Afflante Spiritu," September 30, 1943, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html.

> misunderstandings and misconceptions have always abounded in the Christian church.[7]
>
> But [so Roman Catholics claim], such an infallible divine interpretation of Scripture, however, has been granted by God in his church. Not the dead, uncomprehended, obscure, and bare Bible, but the church, the vital, always present church, which ever renews itself by the power of the Spirit, is the mediatrix of truth and the infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture.[8]

However, quite counter-intuitively, the Reformed doctrine of perspicuity does not simply state that the Scripture is completely transparent and free of any difficulties. Bavinck warns of misunderstanding and misrepresentation by both Protestants and Catholics alike, in interpreting it to mean that the Holy Writ has no "mysteries that far exceed the reach of the human intellect," or is equally clear everywhere to everyone that one can dispense with proper exegesis in an attempt to understand it. What the perspicuity delineates is that the Bible is "simple and intelligible" in its overall message of salvation for any sincere seeker to learn from personal study, "without the assistance and guidance of the church and the priest."[9] This Reformed understanding of the Scripture's perspicuity in its salvific messages, but still retaining mysteries of God, is also another important Christian stance assumed in this dissertation.

## The Inner Person as Divine Mystery

According to the above two major Christian  Biblical positions, the Inner Person in the Pauline and Petrine epistles, due to the fact of its infrequency of appearance and lack of elucidation, should be considered one of the more important mysteries or "dark passages," to quote Luther, contained in the Bible.[10] As the above two Reformed understandings about the

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[7] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:475.

[8] Bavinck, 1:476.

[9] Bavinck, 1:477.

[10] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 84.

Scripture demonstrate, attributing a mystical character to the teaching of the Inner Person does not, in any shape or form, disqualify the present author in holding the Reformed view of the Scripture; neither does it garner him the label of "esotericism" or "mysticism." These latter terms, in modern usage, relate more to religious knowledge or practices "of secrecy, of hiding one's meaning or intention behind an 'exoteric' veneer, [with] 'esoteric' [referring] simply to 'hidden doctrines' of any sort, including ones that are skeptical, atheistic, and materialistic."[11] Such definition clearly is contradictory to the author's conviction and intention in this work.

Overall, the Reformed doctrine of Scripture, its "authority, necessity, sufficiency, and perspicuity," should be considered the Christian  Biblical position of this comparative research, whenever Biblical support is appealed to.

## *Principle of Approach*

The direction taken to do the comparative study can be broadly separated into two major steps: firstly, establishing, as closely as possible, a definition of the Inner Person from Christian sources; and secondly, setting up a model of illumination from Buddhism, primary that of East Asia.

### A Working Definition of the Inner Person

This part of the research is accomplished in three directions: (1) Biblical analysis, including exegesis of modern theologians on the four main Bible passages related to the Inner Person, and on other related Scriptural verses; (2) theological anthropology – dichotomy vs.

[11] Glenn Alexander Magee, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2016), xiv–xv, Editor's Introduction.

trichotomy; and (3) spiritual writings of three Christian contemplatives – Augustine of Hippo, Teresa of Avila, and Catherine of Genoa – whose writings closely relate to the workings of the Inner Person.

These studies suggest to us a working definition of the Inner Person may possibly consists of these facets or attributes: a hidden person, the heart, true self, new creation, the master, among others. These aspects of the Inner Person manifest its various characteristics and functions within the deepest part of the human being, which, from the trichotomist perspective, locates in the human spirit.

## A Model of Illumination from Buddhism

For this model, the material of first choice is primary sources such as *sūtras* (considered to be the teachings of the Buddha himself, with the exception of the *Platform Sūtra* of the Sixth Patriarch, Huè Néng) and *śāstras* (treatises, commentaries, and other discourses not directly conveyed by the Buddha). Of particular interest is the MMPNS, or *Nirvāna Sūtra*, in the Chinese translation due to the various advantages it affords us, as indicated above. Whenever possible, the passages are translated by the present author with the aid of existing English translations and Buddhist dictionaries readily available online.

It is observed that the doctrine of *Tathāgatagarbha* (lit. "womb/embryo of the Thus Come/Go One") is closely associated with the *Ālaya-vijñāna*, or the Eighth Consciousness of the Yogācāra school. When the doctrine was introduced to China, these two concepts were conflated as one, along with other terminologies such as the self, and Buddha Nature. And it was postulated that all sentient beings, not just the Buddha, possess such a nature from timeless beginning, but is heavily concealed by adventitious defilements. Due to this hypothesis, it

becomes possible, though not necessary quick or easy, for anyone to recover this hidden Buddha Nature within, through the process of enlightenment and cultivation.

Summarily, major attributes or titles that the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine either inherited from India or "acquired" in China encompass the following: the true nature (真性 *zhēn xìng*), Buddha Nature (佛性 *fuó xìng*), the embryo/womb of the Thus Come One (如來藏 r*ú lái zàng*), the mind of all sentient beings (眾生心 *zhòng shēng xīn*), the True Self (真我 *zhēn wǒ*) but also non-self, permanent existence (*sat*), being conscious (*cit*), bliss (*ānanda*), self-existence, true suchness, non-empty emptiness (*aśūnyatā śūnyatā*), procreativeness, pervasiveness, hiddenness, and so forth. These various characteristics constitute the model of illumination for comparison with the Inner Person.

## *Comparing the Inner Person with Tathāgatagarbha*

The framework of comparison is built by first outlining the differences between the two traditions, and then carefully examine their similarities, without drawing conclusive statements of equivalence.

### Contrasts

Early Indian (Nikāya) Buddhism is considered to be rational and atheistic. It describes Gautama Buddha as an earthly teacher without suprahuman capabilities, preaching the way of *mokṣa* or liberation. It upholds the *Abhidhamma* philosophy, which denies the real existence of the self in the aspect of the "ultimate truth." The only thing that is permanent and unchanging is a

state of *Nirvāna*, meaning "bliss" and "extinction." Accordingly, Nāgārjuna advocates the theory of *anātman*, or no-self. In contrast, the Inner Person is sometimes referred to as "true self."

Later, in Yogācāra school that promulgates the philosophy of "consciousness only," a permanent Eighth Consciousness, *Ālaya-vijñāna*, is proposed as a mechanism to store karmic seeds, to account for the continuity of *saṃsāra* that spans multiple lifetimes. Since this *Ālaya-vijñāna* is bound by karmic defilements, liberation is only attained when there is a continuous transformation of the basis that cuts off the Eighth Consciousness, along with all its afflictions, to form a new Ninth Consciousness – the *Amala-vijñāna*. At such a stage, the individual is transformed from a common person to a noble saint.

The defiled status of the *Ālaya-vijñāna* is redolent of the Christian concept of original sin, in that they both accompany a person from birth throughout life, and necessitate a complete transformation of the person to effect salvation or liberation. However, numerous differences do exist between the two sides: (1) *Ālaya-vijñāna* is a beginningless consciousness with no causes specified for its defilements, and it carries on its function spanning endless lifetimes until cut off by awakening, whereas the Christian original sin began with Adam and Eve's fall, is inherited through birth, and ceases upon death. (2) *Ālaya-vijñāna* is somewhat morally neutral, and serves as justice in karma. But sin in the Christian sense is the source of moral degradation, constantly drawing mankind away from God, Who is the ultimate Justice. (3) Salvation in Yogācāra entails the elimination of *Ālaya-vijñāna* by realization first, then self-cultivation. But in Christianity, sinful humanity has no ability to turn to God until and unless God takes the initiative of redemption. (4) The concept of "saint" in Yogācāra implies suprahuman abilities, whereas the notion in Christianity is "separation" from the secularity of this world onto God for His holy purposes, often manifesting humility and meekness in the present dispensation. (5) Yogācāra still

inherits the *anātman* posture of early Buddhism, making it incompatible with the Christian Inner Person that is continuously being strengthened and renewed.

Mahāyāna Buddhism originally inherited the atheistic position of Nikāya, but, especially after being transmitted to China, has evolved into various schools, some of which developed a pantheon of supernatural beings, or even deify the Buddhas (plural, because they also believe all sentient beings has the potential to become one, due to their Buddha Nature), to provide divine assistance to the sincere followers. It is in this process of introducing deities into their doctrines that these schools take on some theistic hues. Mahāyānism, along with these "theistic" schools, further propagate to other regions of East Asia. It generally upholds the *Tathāgatagarbha* as the Buddha Nature that exists in all sentient beings, treating it as an eternal entity awaiting to be realized in the individual Buddhist. Although the significances of the deities in this major branch of Buddhism are radically different from the God of Abrahamic religions, such "theism," nevertheless, brings Mahāyānism a step closer to Christianity, and sets a foundation for this comparative project.

## Similitude

With the definition we derived for the Inner Person, and the model of illumination of the *Tathāgatagarbha* from MMPNS and other *sūtras*, many potential parallels exist between the *Tathāgatagarbha* of East Asian Buddhism and the Inner Person of Christianity. At least nine major characteristics can be juxtaposed.

19. Divinity – The *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* 寶藏論 (*Treatise of the Treasure*) equates Truth with 神 *Shén* (common Chinese for "god"), which implies that *Tathāgatagarbha* is considered to be *Shén*, since the Tathāgata is the ultimate Truth. Additionally, the treatise also attributes to this

Mahāyāna "divinity" the properties of: the Way (or *Dào*), the bodily Incarnation, creativity, eternality, immortality, transcendence, and immutability. For the Inner Person, because it receives life from the Creator, and because the Bible actually calls God's children, gods, it is reasoned that the Inner Person also has some similar divine attributes.

20. Eternity – The *Bǎo Zàng Lùn* states that "the Truth … abides forever, is unborn, and does not age." This eternity is confirmed in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, which states that the Tathāgata body is eternally abiding, imperishable, and adamantine. In Christianity, the "blueprint" of mankind was in the mind of God before the creation. Although human corporeality and the Inner Person have a starting point at the making of Adam, the eternity of the human being lies in the eschaton, after the conclusion of the present world.
21. Purity – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* discourses a great deal on the purity of the *Tathāgatagarbha*. Moreover, the Sixth Patriarch of Chán teaches the original purity of Buddha Nature. Similarly, the Inner Person indubitably was originally pure when YHWH breathed it into Adam. The Inner Person due to the fall becomes contaminated by sin; likewise, the *Tathāgatagarbha* is covered by adventitious defilements, but from past eternity. To redeem the former, it is necessary to have faith in Jesus Christ, to eliminate the old self, and to "put on" His salvation. For the recovery of the *Tathāgatagarbha*, one needs to be awakened first, followed by cultivation. Salvation or liberation entails the purging of the impurities and restoration to pristine condition.
22. True Self – Contained in the *Nirvāna Sūtra* are clear statements that the true self of all sentient beings is *Tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha Nature. The Christian Bible implicitly teaches that the Inner Person exists in all human beings, due to the breath of life that God breathed into Adam, our common ancestor, which constitutes our true self. On the opposite end, the

Buddha also talks about no-self, as a corrective measure for the common delusion of the self. This deluded self-perception has a counterpart in Christianity that is the outer person that consists in the depraved body of sin, darkness, corruption, and death.

23. Immutability – The Tathāgata, *Tathāgatagarbha*, and Buddha Nature in the *Nirvāna Sūtra* are attributed the immutable property in one way or another. Comparatively, the Christian Inner Person could also be ascribed immutability, because (1) both apostles Paul and Peter affirm that it is imperishable, and (2) it derives immutability from Jesus Christ and God, since it also inherits divinity from Them. Other attributes related to immutability can also be found in both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, including such characteristics as bliss, transcendence, and passivity.
24. Hiddenness – Both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person are a precious hidden jewel awaiting discovery to effect one's liberation or salvation. The hidden connotation can be observed from the terminology used in association with *Tathāgatagarbha* in the *Nirvāna Sūtra*, and in the Bible's allusions to the secrecy of God, Christ, and truths. Particularly notable is the paradoxical nature of the secrecy of Jesus Christ, in that truths can be hidden to the arrogant, but revealed to the meek and simple. Similarly the Buddha talks about "two-truths," as a bifurcated way for the dissemination of the Dharma, separating the commoner and the enlightened. Both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person are ordinarily concealed until one's awakening, by either self-realization, in the Buddhist case, and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, in the Christian case.
25. Mystery – This property is closely related to hiddenness. The *Nirvāna Sūtra's* apophatic treatment of the *Tathāgatagarbha* body and the Buddha Nature renders them mystical. In parallel, the Inner Person can be interpreted as part of God's mystery, because it may "discern

all things," but "is by no one discerned" for a "spiritual" person. For such a person, "to live is Christ," because Christ, through the Holy Spirit, may freely reign both the Inner Person and the outward person. Thus, the invisible Inner Person assumes the mystical nature of the incarnate and resurrected Christ.

26. Sovereignty – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* employs the word *aiśvarya (sovereignty, 自在 zì zài)* in various passages to depict liberty and sovereignty of the Tathāgata and Buddha Nature. The sovereignty of the Inner Person is demonstrated by the apostle Paul in exercising complete freedom as "all things [being] lawful for me" and his being "free from all men."
27. Dominion – The *Nirvāna Sūtra* indicates that the self is a lord, and the Buddha Nature is the dwelling place of the Sacred King, Dharma Lord, the Great Nirvāna. These titles appropriately suit the *Tathāgatagarbha* as the governor and ruler of the whole person, because it is the true self. In another *sūtra*, consciousness is portrayed as the lord of the body, directing all speeches and acts. This makes the *Tathāgatagarbha*, being the highest, Eighth Consciousness, the master of the body. Comparatively, the Book of Romans (14:4) teaches that the decision-making process is assigned to the internal master, presumably the Inner Person. Unfortunately, for the unawakened, the throne is usurped by either the seventh consciousness or the outward person, resulting in the loss of spiritual integrity and personal wellbeing. Consequently, reinstating the dominion of the *Tathāgatagarbha* or the Inner Person becomes an imperative, weighty issue.

These differences and similarities allow us to probe deeper into the working of both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person, pointing out a possibility for us to have an inner encounter that can be life-changing. This information also sets the theoretical foundation for an

in-depth discussion on the practical steps required to achieve such enlightenment, intended for the sequel to this dissertation.

## *Final Remarks*

This research project has been an eye-opening personal journey, both intellectual and spiritual. Astonishing discoveries are found in the two widely diverse world religions representing the East and the West, both as contrasts and as parallels. These findings embody the accumulated wisdoms spanning the past several millennia, but seem just as applicable in today's post-modern world of rapid scientific and technological advancement. Such knowledge and awareness may even be more needful at present, as a reminder and inspiration to return to the neglected spirituality, and as a balance for the endless outward, secular pursuits.

At first blush, the concept of the Inner Person in the Christian New Testament seems to be an obscure one, due to its scarce occurrence. Careful examination, however, reveals that its insinuation can be gleaned in myriad places throughout both Testaments. Not only so, but it even finds a counterpart on the other side of the world, as *Tathāgatagarbha* or Buddha Nature in East Asian Buddhism. Although, as repeatedly emphasized, there cannot be any direct correlations between the two sides, there do exist enough amazing similitude to afford the following conclusions:

- In both East Asian Buddhism and Christianity, there is an internal "element" of the human construct that is well concealed, like a hidden treasure, waiting for our personal discovery and realization.
- Both the *Tathāgatagarbha* and the Inner Person have crucial importance in our spirituality, but are ordinarily hidden due to karma, ignorance, numbness, sin, etc.

- Both of these secret inner realities can be unveiled, either through awakening and cultivation, or through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.
- Real spiritual progress begins only when the *Tathāgatagarbha* or the Inner Person is fully realized and functioning as the master of our inner self or spirit.

These preliminary findings may well be a first step toward a more meaningful way of living our earthly life as a spiritually oriented person, as we are destined to be originally, and as the psalmist spoke of the temperament of YHWH:

Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts,

And in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

(Psalms 51:6)

# APPENDIX A.
# ΛΌΓΟΣ AND ΡΉΜΑ

Many Greek words in the New Testament have lost their subtle nuance in the process of translation into other languages, English not being an exception. This type of incongruence has always been one of the most taxing conundrums and linguistic barriers for translators of any language, because what is involved is, among other things, the socio-cultural backgrounds inherent in languages that are extremely difficult to transpose and convey.

Among the most often neglected distinctions in Biblical Greek vocabulary are: (1) love (ἀγαπάω [v] / ἀγάπη [n] vs. φιλέω [v] / φιλία [n]); (2) soul/spirit (ψυχή vs. πνεῦμα); and (3) word (λόγος vs. ῥήμα). It is my belief that if the Bible makes a distinction, there must be a purpose for it, and we cannot gloss over these terms. Thus, there must be a clear distinction between the human soul (ψυχή) and spirit (πνεῦμα), since the Scripture distinguishes them; they, together with the body, make up the three fundamental constituents of the human construct. In the same way, λόγος and ῥήμα serve different purposes, even though they are both translated into English as "word."

How are these two Greek words defined? *Vine's Dictionary* provides the following: "λόγος denotes (I) the expression of thought – not the mere name of an object – (a) as embodying a conception or idea … (b) a saying or statement by God … [or] by Christ. … (II) The Personal Word, a title of the Son of God …" and "ῥήμα denotes that which is spoken, what is uttered in speech or writing; in the singular, a word … in the plural, speech, discourse …."[1, 2] Vine also includes their distinction:

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[1] Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, s.v. "WORD: 1. LOGOS."
[2] Vine, s.v. "WORD: 2. RHEMA."

> The significance of *rhema* [ῥήμα] (as distinct from *logos*) is exemplified in the injunction to take 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,' Eph. 6:17; here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture.[3]

Oddly enough, *Strong's Concordance* gives precisely the same definitions and their differences, to the exact letter.[4, 5] It is clear, then, that both Vine's and Strong's interpretations indicate that λόγος, when not referring to Christ Himself, is the Word of God in the objective sense, as recorded in the Scripture, whereas ῥήμα would be the timely, subjective sayings of the Holy Spirit to the individual for his or her personal use, whether as defense, comfort, command, or simply deeper enlightenment.

In a similar manner, Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy operates on the premise of the subjective knowledge of God:

> Even Christianity, as a religion, is pagan, seeking to remake God in the image of man. Real faith, on the other hand, is the result of God's searching for humanity. No human being may know God until He reveals Himself to that specific individual in a specific relational context, for God is "wholly Other," unknowable on the basis of human reason. Any logical postulations on the nature and Person of God can come about only "after the fact" of a personal experience with Him.[6]

But, his theology was more based on his intuition or deduction from reading the Bible than from comparing the differences between the two Greek words, λόγος and ῥήμα, since he did not mention them as an association. Even so, his assertion that we cannot know God with human reasoning, but only through His own revelation individually "in a specific relational context" is surprisingly close to the Reformed understanding of theologians like Bavinck. Barth's stress on God's sovereignty and the central role of Jesus Christ is on par with the Reformed position. The

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[3] Vine, s.v. "WORD: 2. RHEMA."

[4] Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, s.v. "3056. λόγος."

[5] Strong, s.v. "4487. ῥήμα."

[6] David Lorne Smith, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 28. David L. Smith is Executive Vice President and Seminary Dean of Heritage College and Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario.

criticism of Smith is unnecessarily harsh, that "Barth's doctrine of God so stresses His transcendence as to make Him virtually inaccessible," and that "if God is as hidden and inscrutable as he [Barth] suggests, no human may know Him. Indeed, one wonders how one may know Him to the point of having any sort of faith (salvific) relationship."[7] God's transcendence does not preclude Him from revealing Himself to humanity, as He did throughout history to prophets and apostles. Furthermore, neither does His transcendence isolate His salvation from the elect, since each individual Christian's salvation can properly be considered a subjective revelation of God, as the apostle Paul told us: "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son … Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

The calling of God, of necessity, is on an individual basis throughout history, and in very diverse manners, as testified by the unique story of conversion in every Christian. The Holy Spirit does the work of individual and efficacious calling of the elect, described by the later Augustine as the "inspiration of faith and of the fear of God," and by Calvin as "the hidden inspiration of God" secretly directing all movements to their end.[8, 9] Such individualized inspiration to effect one's salvation can be considered the bestowal of the subjective ῥήμα as a special, deeper kind of grace effecting the change of the depraved human will, as Augustine came to realized after about AD 396, after which time "Augustine arrived at a completely different doctrine of grace. Frequently he also described the objective benefits – the gospel, baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and so on – with the word 'grace.' But this grace is not enough.

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[7] Smith, 30.

[8] Gustav Friedrich Wiggers, *An Historical Presentation of Augustinism and Pelagianism from the Original Sources* (New York: Gould, Newman & Saxton, 1840), 198. Wiggers (1777–1860) was professor of theology at the University of Rostock in Germany.

[9] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 135.

Still another grace is needed, an internal and spiritual kind that illumines the intellect and bends the will."[10] Such is the special grace through the ῥήμα tailored specifically for each individual Christian.

Bavinck further elucidates this ῥήμα in the form of grace: "Grace is anterior to all merits; it is prevenient, preparatory, antecedent, and efficacious. It 'is prevenient to the unwilling to make him will.' It inwardly illumines the intellect and frees it from blindness. It produces faith, which is a gift of God, and creates a good will, love for the good, and the capacity to do good and removes the weakness from it."[11] This miracle of conversion of the human heart is described by Augustine as "not by law and teaching uttering their lessons from without, but by a secret, wonderful, and ineffable power operating within that God works in human hearts, not only revelations of the truth, but even good dispositions of the will."[12] Here, "law and teaching … from without" would be the plain text of religious matters, including the Scripture, but "revelations of the truth" would be the individualized ῥήμα that the Holy Spirit speaks to the specific person to cause the fundamental change of the mind, or "good dispositions of the will." We know that ῥήμα is one of the primary media at work in this process, because grace cannot work without any means, and the most direct and effective influence on the intellect comes through the lively word of the Gospel, in this case the ῥήμα made individually penetrating through the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit's enlivening, the Bible frequently could just as well be deemed "the letter that kills" (2 Corinthians 3:6). There is a remote possibility that the reason for the New Testament to withhold the full disclosure of the Inner

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[10] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 509.

[11] Bavinck, 3:510.

[12] Philip Schaff and Anthony Uyl, eds., *Saint Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Works* (Woodstock, Canada: Devoted, 2017), 315.–

Person could be that God does not want it to be so plainly laid bare as to cause its dissemination in the Scripture to become "the letter."

Additionally, Bavinck distinguishes the authority of the Bible "between historical (descriptive) and normative (prescriptive) authority," because "Far from everything recorded in Scripture has normative authority for our faith and conduct. Much of what was commanded and instituted by God, or prescribed and enjoined by prophets and apostles, no longer applies to us directly and pertained to persons living in an earlier age."[13] The implication is that the reader of the Bible cannot just arbitrarily take a Biblical teaching and apply it. One must be cautious about the intended audience of the passages and their historical significances. That is to say, one must approach the Bible in an objective manner, until and unless the Holy Spirit makes it subjective to the individual, by His ῥήμα spoken directly to the person or indirectly through circumstances.

In the Christians' practical life, how does ῥήμα influence them? The "Prince of Preachers," Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) informs us:[14] "We may rest assured that somewhere in the inspired page there is a promise fitting the occasion. The infinite wisdom of God is seen in his having given us a revelation which meets the innumerable varieties of his people's conditions. … If we do not find a fitting promise, it is because we do not look for it; or having found it, have not yet perceived its full meaning."[15] Then, how do we "perceive" the "full meaning" of the Bible? Spurgeon further explains: "Frequently the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance with life and power words of the Lord which else we might have forgotten. He also sheds a new light upon well-remembered passages, and so reveals a fulness in them which

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[13] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:459.

[14] E. F. Adcock, *Charles H. Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Anderson, IN: Gospel Trumpet, 1925).

[15] Charles H. Spurgeon, *According to Promise: Or the Lord's Method of Dealing with His Chosen People* (Greenville, SC: Gospel Hour, 1900), 106.

we had little suspected."[16] Therefore, it is important for the Christian to read the Bible, not to find immediate solutions to life's problems, but to accumulate a "Biblical database," so to speak, of God's λόγος, in order for the Holy Spirit to call to our remembrance the ῥήμα most needed for our life, just at the right moment for the right occasion.

In conclusion, λόγος and ῥήμα are two Greek words in the Bible that have their distinct meanings and purposes. As Word of God, λόγος is God's oracle revealed to humanity to unveil Himself and His purposes for the world; but it is not a guide for Christian everyday living and decision making. It encompasses God's plans throughout human history and even basic ethical teachings in order for fallen humanity not to go astray. But, God's intention in this end-time dispensation, "the dispensation of the Spirit [leading to] subjective appropriation," is His tabernacle within us, His עִמָּנוּאֵל / Ἐμμανουήλ (Emmanuel, "God with us"), through the indwelling Holy Spirit, who will, at the appropriate time and occasion, speak the ῥήμα through God's λόγος to effect edification, consolation, instruction, commission, and other divine purposes in the individual Christian's life.[17]

[16] Spurgeon, 107.

[17] Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:383.

# APPENDIX B.
# TAXONOMY OF "VISIONS" FREQUENTLY REFERENCED BY SPIRITUAL CONTEMPLATIVES

For a brief examination of the different visionary experiences often mentioned by contemplatives, we turn to the magnum opus of Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, because her analysis is quite comprehensive and detailed. In their anthology of Christian mysticism, Louis K Dupré and James A Wiseman introduce her with high praise: "Few spiritual writers were more influential in the twentieth century than the Anglo-Catholic poet, novelist, and scholar of mysticism Evelyn Underhill."[1]

The views of Underhill regarding spiritual auditions and visions differ radically from her contemporaries' purely psychological or philosophical positions:

> She took a rather polemical stance … in her confrontation with William James's four characteristics of the mystical experience in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. James had insisted on the cognitive quality of the mystical consciousness, whereas Underhill instead emphasizes the practical (as opposed to the theoretical) character of mystical writings. She holds that it is this character that distinguishes such writings from theological tracts, which do no more than inspire what is properly mystical. Similarly, the so-called mystical philosophers (mostly Neoplatonists) are but stepping stones to the practical, mystical life.[2]

Underhill notes that the word *vision*, "that vaguest of words" in the world of mysticism, is employed by both proponents and opponents of this universal human phenomena "to describe or obscure a wide range of experience: from formless intuition, through crude optical hallucination, to the voluntary visualizations common to the artistic mind." Thus it is no easy task to study such personal encounters with the invisible, intangible realms. Religiously speaking, they encompass two major categories: (1) "that personal and secret vision which is the lover's glimpse of Perfect

[1] Dupré and Wiseman, *Light from Light*, 228.

[2] Dupré and Wiseman, 228.

Love," and (2) "the great pictures seen by clairvoyant prophets acting in their capacity as eyes of the race." According to the fifteenth century mystical theologian, Denis the Carthusian, visions of the first class are supposed "to be concealed," and of the second class, "to be declared. The first are more truly mystic, the second are more prophetic in type." But even if just the first category is considered, "a sufficient variety of experience remains in the purely mystical class."[3]

Breaking down this second category further, Underhill divides it into three main types: (1) Intellectual – "substantial or inarticulate," (2) Imaginary – "interior and distinct," and (3) Corporeal – "exterior [visions]." In this order, they represent a "progressive externalization on the self's part of those concepts or intuitions which form the bases of all automatic [note: passive] states." The mystic should be primarily concerned with the first two kinds of vision, since the third "is little else than a more or less uncontrolled externalization of inward memories, thoughts, or intuitions – often, as Madame Guyon acutely observed, of some pious picture which has become imprinted on the mind – which may, in some subjects, attain the dimensions of true sensorial hallucination."[4] For this reason, we will discuss only the first two types of vision below.

## *Intellectual Vision*

As the innermost encounter with the divine spiritual world, the intellectual vision is generally ineffable, but such difficulty does not inhibit the contemplatives from the endeavor to write down their perception of it as they underwent such experience. In summarizing their descriptions, Underhill laments that such vision

> is of so elusive, spiritual, and formless a kind that it is very hard to distinguish it from that act of pure contemplation in which it generally takes its rise. … The intellectual vision, so far as we can understand it, seems to be a something not

[3] Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, 334.
[4] Underhill, 338.

> sought but put before the mind, and seen or perceived by the whole self by means of a sense which is neither sight nor feeling, but partakes of the character of both. It is intimate but indescribable: definite, yet impossible to define.[5]

Despite this ineffability, for those who have experienced intellectual vision, it is not a vague, easily vaporized mental impression that can be dismissed as psychological aberration of the overly imaginative personality; but rather, it "is a sense of presence so concrete, defined, and sharply personal that, as St. Teresa says, it carries more conviction than bodily sight."[6] Here, Underhill is referring to Teresa's saying that "though He is unseen He imprints so clear a knowledge on the soul that there seems to be no possibility of doubt. The Lord is pleased to engrave it so deeply on the understanding that one can no more doubt it than one can doubt the evidence of one's eyes. In fact it is easier to doubt one's eyes" (*Life*, 27.6).

In this transcendent spiritual state, since nothing close to what we understand as "vision" transpires, the word *vision* loses its relevancy. Contrary to what modern psychoanalysts believe, in such a vision, the human consciousness reaches its peak, and the possibility of hallucination, on the other hand, sinks to nearly nil. No visual scene can be identified or ascribed, not even in association with "the eyes of the soul or mind." It can be regarded as "pure apprehension … of Personality [and] of knowledge."[7] In Pauline language, it resembles something that occurs in the Inner Person because of the lack of communication channel to the outward person that we normally function in.

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[5] Underhill, 338.

[6] Underhill, 339–40.

[7] Underhill, 340.

## *Imaginary Vision*

This second type of interior vision also does not involve illusions of the physical senses, and yet the soul, or spirit, or self, clearly knows that it apprehends distinctly and unobstructively, through the "inward eye." This is also a passive phenomenon, meaning that it occurs spontaneously without any participation of the soul's willing. Underhill divides this vision into two major forms, one symbolic, and the other, personal.[8]

### Symbolic Form

In this form of imaginary vision, the soul/spirit/self knows that certain truth is revealed to her "under an image." Furthermore,

> we see the mystic's passion for the Absolute, his intuition of Its presence in his soul, combining with the constituents of poetic imagination and expressing themselves in an allegorical form. It is really a visualized poem, inspired by a direct contact with truth. Of the same kind are many of those great reconstructions of Eternity in which mystics and seers of the transcendent and outgoing type actualized their profound apprehensions of truth. In such cases, as Beatrice told Dante when he saw the great vision of the River of Light, the thing seen is the shadowy presentation of a transcendent Reality which the self is not yet strong enough to see. … It is an accommodation of the supra-sensible to our human disabilities, a symbolic reconstruction of reality.[9]

The last sentence informs us that, from a Judeo-Christian perspective, it is God who condescends to our human frailty, depravity and incapacity, who takes the initiative to manifest His realities or Himself, or to send down His agents to us, in a symbolic form that His chosen human vessels might perceive. For such select few who experienced this vision, its reality so far surpassed what we may ordinarily discern with our natural senses, that "it may well claim precedence over that prosaic and perpetual vision which we call the 'real world.'" Such image is

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[8] Underhill, 342.

[9] Underhill, 343–44.

not a very rare occurrence, and can happen unexpectedly to a practitioner of meditation, vaguely or vividly. Either way, "it always brings with it a greater impression of reality than can be obtained by the more normal operations of the mind."[10]

## Personal Form

In this form of imaginary vision, the image received by the mystic is no longer just an object, but an actual Person. It "is at once so vivid, so closely related to the concrete beliefs and spiritual passions of the self, and so perfectly expresses its apprehensions of God, that it is not always recognized as symbolic in kind." Underhill again cites Teresa as one of the few chosen receptacles "who have detected the true character of automatisms of this sort: which bring with them – like their purer forms, the intellectual visions of God – a vivid apprehension of Personality, the conviction of a living presence, rather than the knowledge of new facts."[11] In Teresa's own words,

> At times it certainly seemed to me as if I were looking at a painting, but on many other occasions it appeared to be no painting but Christ Himself, such was the clarity with which He was pleased to appear to me. Yet there were times when the vision was so indistinct that I did think it was a painting, though it bore no resemblance even to the most perfect of earthly pictures, and I have seen some good ones. No, it would be absurd to speak of any resemblance; the vision was no more like a painting than a portrait is like a living man (Life, 28.7).

This reality experienced by Teresa is, once more, so much beyond description that she has to use the word *painting* to tell the reader about its realness, that it is not a psychological phenomenon; but then she immediately negates it, so as not to render any substantiality or tangibility to it. From this, Underhill draws such a conclusion:

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[10] Underhill, 344–45.

[11] Underhill, 345–46.

> It seems, then, that this swift and dazzling vision of Divine Personality may represent a true contact of the soul with the Absolute Life – a contact immediately referred to the image under which the Self is accustomed to think of its God. In the case of Christian contemplatives this image will obviously be most usually the historical Person of Christ, as He is represented in sacred literature and art.[12]

In summary, there are generally three categories of visions that contemplatives describe their encounter with the Ultimate Reality – corporeal, imaginary, and intellectual, in the order of ever deepening inwardness. The first, corporeal category is dismissed by Underhill as too superficial to be significant in regard to true contemplation. The imaginary class involves an internal imagery, either symbolic or personal, which represents, respectively, the truth or personality revealed. The innermost "vision" is of the intellectual category, which is actually not any type of vision as we ordinarily conceived, but an ineffable, yet more than real, impression of communication with the Divine. Teresa of Avila remarks about these three classes of vision in her autobiography: "Those who know better than I say that my previous [first] vision was more perfect than this [imaginary] one, while this in its turn is much nearer to perfection than those that are seen with the eyes of the body. The latter [corporeal vision], they say, is the lowest kind, and the one most open to delusions from the devil" (*Life*, 28.4). The intellectual vision that both Underhill and Teresa mention, in all likelihood, relates intimately to what the apostle Paul describes as the Inner Person.

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[12] Underhill, 346.

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